WE BECOME ATHEISTS

GORA

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IT

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Atheist Centre, 1972

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AARU MASAALLO
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WE BECOME ATHEISTS

GORA

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INTRODUCTION

We look back into our lives and review them either for ourselves or for others. We weigh the pros and cons of the past from the vantage of the present. Such a retrospect more often than not is coloured by our looking at them from a time which is not its own. Our passions cool down and our past views change. It is next to impossible to re-live our past, but retrospection is as valuable a psychological process as introspection. They may lead a man into dejection or inspire him to further action.

A man like Gora can hardly find time to spare for writing an autobiography. His life was so active and dynamic that he hardly found time to stand and stare. He was not a man to wait for things to shape his life. He endevoured all his life to shape them. He was of the firm opinion that free humans shape events and create conditions and slaves' lives are shaped by events. In choosing alternatives or giving a turn to events he displayed a rare dymamic spirit. In organsing campaigns for the establishment of social and economic equalities, he could not indulge in the pleasure of sharing his personal experiences with others.

Gora suffered and struggled. He put up with hardships patiently and with a smile on his lips. If he had compromised his principles on any issue he would not have been Gora. With his family, friends and colleagues backing him up he weathered many a storm. Those who knew him personally know how he kept sufferings to himself and spared a smile for others. It was not self imposed

suffering but he suffered for atheism. All his life was devoted to removing the prejudice against atheism and making it an accaptable and respectable term. He made atheism more positive than negetive. In this he differed from other rationalists and agnostics. He fought against all religious, racial, communal and caste lables. He stood for democracy, economic and social equalities. All his campaigns were directed towards this goal. He respected human personality and raised his voice against anything that denies or curbs human free-will.

In his hectic life, at the age of 73, he could spare a month to write about his past experiences, rather, in outline. Four days after finishing this draft he breathed his last. He didn't expect to die so early. He hoped to live actively, at least, for ten years more. When he was asked to write an autobiography, he pleaded lack of time. His mind was attuned more to programmes of action than to cool retrospection. But he did look back on his life at its fag end. We don't know what he would have done if he had lived longer. But what little he has given us of his autobiography is a precious picture of his life and message. Gora's life was intertwined with his philosophy. So, while he was narrating certain experiences and influences in his life he invariably gave expression to his views on human affairs. A careful reader will find in this book the quintessence of his life and views from his own pen. Gora lived and died an atheist.

ATHIEST CENTRE.
Patamata, Vijayawada.
13th November, 1975.

LAVANAM

WE BECOME ATHEISTS

CHAPTER-I

THE CHANGE

To this account of my life, I would like to give the name, "We Become Atheists", rather than "I Become an Atheist." Of course, I take the responsibility for initiating the kind of atheist thought and action described herein. But its fulfilment is largely the result of the cooperation, sacrifice and resolute action of several workers, friends, relatives and, particularly, of my wife and children. Some of them adopted atheism too. Therefore, it is appropriate to call this account, "We Become Atheists."

As I look back, I recall no special event that turned me an atheist. But I can trace the growth of atheist thought and practice in me.

Born and bred up in a high caste Hindu family in India, I was conventionally orthodox and superstitious in the days of my boyhood. I believed in the claims of divine revelations by my parental aunt. Twice or thrice in a week, she went into trances, muttered advice and distributed sacred ash. I constantly kept a small packet of the ash in my pocket and thought that the presence of the ash enabled me to pass examinations at the school. I passed the Intermediate examination in first class. I little imagined

that a few years later, when I became an atheist, I would drive the pretences of obsession out of my aunt. But even at the age of 22, when I appeared for the degree examination of M. A., I had the packet in my pocket. All the same, I passed last in the rank of five candidates for the subject of Botany.

Being the last in the rank, ordinarily I had the least chance of getting a job. My father was in economic distress. I thought that if I could not help him with my earnings, at least, I should not be a burden on the joint family. What could I do ? The old saying that where there is a will there is a way, acquired a new significance for me. I wrote to my Professor, R. V. Seshayya, who was then working at Tirupati. I offered myself to be his servant if he could give me food and lodge. He sympathised with my sad condition. He called me to Tirupathi and treated me like his brother. I was doing odd jobs at his home.

The security at Seshayya's household set me think of my life. I lost faith in the packet of ash and developed the will to succeed. Sense of self- confidence sprouted in me. Though I had no idea of atheism at that time, obviously that was the beginning of atheism in me. It was opening up my mind and taking me out of the ruts of orthodoxy.

Two months later, the lecturership in Natural Science at the American Mission College, Madurai, fell vacant. Solmon, who was holding the post, left for USA for higher studies. The other four of my classmates did not apply for that post in the hope of getting better jobs. Good or bad, I took it up. I found that my classmates did not fare better than I. I was last in rank at the examination, but I rose to be the first in job position in due course. I owed the success to the attitude of atheism that was growing in me. My mind was becoming bold and open.

Seshayya kindly provided me with the necessary money to buy some clothes and to go to Madurai.

Two incidents at Madurai speak of the change of my mind. At Madurai I was faced with the problem of finding a suite of rooms for my residence. Madurai is a place of pilgrimage and a crowded city. After vigorous search, I found a big house in the outskirts of the city. For the last few months it was kept locked and unoccupied as it was supposed to be haunted by ghosts. I disregarded the superstition and the landlord gladly let out two rooms for me at a nominal rent. Fine. Practically, the whole house with thirteen rooms and two halls was open to me. I lived alone in it.

My neighbours and also my colleagues at the college dissuaded me from taking the risk of living in a haunted house. They related to me their personal experiences of unwitting residence in haunted houses. I pooh poohed them. After two or three months, tenents gradually came to occupy other rooms. Soon the house was full and I was confined to my original two rooms.

The other incident related to my work at the college. It was a practice in those days to select students for appearance at the final university examination. The Selection test was held three months in advance of the final examination and the unselected students were denied the opportunity to improve their standard by diligent study during that period. When I was a student, I felt that the practice of selection was unfair to the unselected students. At the American Mission College, for the first time, as a lecturer, I got the authority to select among my students. I deliberately gave pass marks to all my students and recommended the selection of all of them for appearance at the final university examination.

My method looked strange to the principal, Rev. W. W. Wallace, who had been used to the practice of selection. He thought that being new to the appointment and inexperienced, I was inconsiderate. He asked me to revise my full

list of recommendations for selection. I told him: "I taught the class. I set the test paper. I valued the answers. If any of them failed, it means I failed to teach them well. I am satisfied with their performance at the test. I recommend all my students for selection." Now I see it was a piece of bravado. However, with age and experience, Rev. Wallace looked at my championship of students with sympathy and endorsed the list of selection of all my students with the admonition that he would not honour my recommendations hereafter, unless the present batch of students acquitted themselves creditably at the final examination.

I narrated the event to my students and said, "I have done my duty. Now, it is for you to do yours." The appeal worked well. The principal was surprised that the final results gave a bumper crop of first classes, distinctions and high percentage of passes.

Evidently everyone bears immense potentialities. Release them. With a sense of freedom and responsibility, they work wonders. I achieved success when I gave up dependence on the packet of ash and stood on my feet. I tried the same with my students who were generally depressed with the fear of failure at the selection.

I removed the fear and the students proved worthy of the trust reposed in them.

India was under the British rule till 1947. The government helped promotion of Christian institutions. The Christian missionary institutions, in their turn, zealously attempted at proselytization. Accordingly, Rev. Wallace suggested to me that I could go to Yale University for my Ph. D. and become the Rector of the science department if I would embrace Christianity and become a member of their mission.

At once I felt a Hindu. Though I was leaning atheistically, I had not got over the influence of early nurture. I continued a vegetarian which was the habit of the caste into which I was born. I wore the 'sacred thread' which was the symbol of the caste. The discarding of the packet of ash was just the beginning of the march towards the goal of atheism. I had a long way to go. Also the goal was not well-defined in my mind at that time. Therefore, when I did not accept the offer of Rev. Wallace, I was more a Hindu than an atheist. Of course, the question of change of religion does not arise with an atheist at all, because he rejects all religions. But my reaction to the suggestion was that of a Hindu.

In view of the excellent results of my students at the final examination, the principal did not want to disturb my place in the college. But, when I rejected the offer of change of religion, I thought that my position in the college was unsafe. A post was vacant at the Agricultural Research Institute, Coimbatore and I shifted there in the month of May, 1926. Rev. Wallace gave me a good certificate of my services at the College for one year.

CHAPTER - II

THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE

The suggestion that I might become a christian, helped me indirectly. I followed the customs of Hinduism and adopted the habits of the caste of my parents, because I was taught and trained in my childhood that way. Just like mother tongue, we generally imbibe thoughts and practices of parents or of guardians, without examining their merits and defects. In the case of religious faiths, we are taught to cling to the faith of the parents and to decry other faiths. This close mindedness is the cause of Jihads and Crusades. But my reaction was somewhat different. The rejection of the offer of Christianity raised a series of questions in me. What is Hinduism? What is Christianity? How are they different? What are other religions? How do they compare with one another? With a desire to know the answers, I started reading English or Telugu translations of the Bible, Bhagavatgita, the Quran, Vedas, Upanishads and other religious books. I went through the volumes of Max Muller's Sacred Books of the East. At one time, for over three months, I pored over the volumes of Encyclopaedia Britannica every day and read through references and

cross references of god, soul, salvation, rebirth, spirituality, other-worlds and so on. Being a student of science, I was already aquainted with the principles of physics, chemistry, geology and mathematics, besides my subjects of botany and zoology. The wide reading introduced me to philosophy, sociology, ethics, economics, politics anthropology, fine arts and psychology. I was especially interested in abnormal and religious psychology, as in them I found the clue to understanding man's belief in the existence of god and soul.

I do not say that my study of the subjects was deep and detailed. I cannot quote page and chapter of any book, though I took down cursory notes as I was reading. But the study was extensive, spread over five or six years. Further reading was casual.

I find that such general reading helped me to reflect and to develop my own thoughts freely rather than become bookish and bind myself to what others said instead of what I have to say. Authority of books shifts responsibility of thoughts to others, whereas reflection retains the freedom and responsibility of the self.

As a result of reading and reflection, I was conceiving of god in general, without denomina-

tional associations of Hinduism, Islam, Christianity or paganism. Further, I came to the conclusion that it was man that made god out of psychological necessity in primitive times. Metaphysical justification of the existence of god was a clever after thought of the civilized man to preserve the faith, at best for its use as a sanction for moral conduct and at worst for aiding exploitation of the gullible masses.

Along with the reading and reflection, I was seeking opportunities to discuss my views with learned persons and religious priests. The opportunity for exchange of views increased when I left for Colombo (Ceylon) after a year at Coimbatore. At Colombo, I was the Botany Master at Ananda College, which was managed by the Buddist Theosophical Society. There I came in contact with Buddist priests, and not only listened to their discourses but studied the books which they kindly lent. The one year stay at Colombo was a valuable gain to me for enriching my knowledge. The next year, 1928, I left Colombo to serve as Lecturer in Botany at Pithapur Rajah's College at Kakinada, India.

I recall with interest an incident of discussion with a Hinudu scholar at Masulipatam, sometime about 1937. He was delivering a series of public discourses on Hindu philosophy and was answer-

ing questions everyday at the end of the talk. At the question time, one evening, I requested him to elucidate on the use of the neuter gender for god (Brahma) of Hindu faith, instead of the customary use of the masculine gender for god as in other faiths. I was aware that in Sanskrit language, in which Hindu scriptures were written, gender went with the form of the word, but not with the meaning of the word. "Dara", a synonym of "wife" in Sanskrit, is masculine gender.

My question was innocent. I wanted confirmation from that scholar that Hindu concept of god as power appropriately needed the use of neuter gender. The use of the masculine gender, on the contrary, betrayed man's domination, in the course of civilization, in philosophical concepts too, as in economic and political affairs.

Perhaps the form in which I put the question did not express the amount of respect expected of references to god. The scholar at once asked me whether I was an atheist. I told him I was. But that did not matter. The question was there to be answered. The scholar's response was different. He said he would not talk to atheists and asked me to leave the meeting. I said that it was a public meeting and that I asked the question at the appointed time. Why should I leave the meeting? The scholar looked

daggers at me. He said he would leave the meeting, if I did not. He got down from the platform, walked a few paces away and stood with his back towards the audience. My repeated requests to him to come back to the meeting were of no avail. Then I said that the gathering should not be deprived of the benefit of his talk on account of me. So I left the meeting. A few who thought that I was right, also left the meeting with me. Next day, a notice was put up at the meeting place, "Atheists are not allowed."

The experience with the Hindu scholar was one of the many instaces when I was confronted with the prejudice against atheism. Dictionaries give "wickedness" as a meaning of "atheism", besides godlessness and impiety. Conscious of the prejudice against atheism, Gandhi advised me to take another name instead of atheism, as however noble the work I do, the name of atheism brings with it disrespect and ignominy, and good work falls into disrepute.

Inspite of these warnings and hard experiences, I prefer to stick to the label of atheism, because atheism alone renders changes, radical and lasting in human affairs. Those who fear the changes studiedly give atheism a bad name in order to stem its growth. Everyone whom succeeding generations respected as a prophet of

an era of freedom and progress was persecuted by contemporaries for heresy and blasphemy, if not wholly for atheism. The life histories of Moses, Jesus, Mohamad, Joan of Arc, and Gandhi are clear instances in this connection. Obviously, atheism is a progressive force. Atheists should not mind the slander and prejudices that vested interests spread against atheism.

Saraswati was ten years old when we were married in 1922. Like me, she hailed from an orthodox home and orthodox custom required girls to be married before puberty. Strict orthodoxy prescribed eighth year as the upper limit for the marriage of girls. My elder sister was eight when she was married. Until the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1935 prohibited early marriages, women's lot was miserable with early pregnancy and occasional widowhood.

According to custom, Saraswati gave up school study soon after her marriage and engaged herself in religious ceremonies that are prescribed for married girls. Observance of the cermonies is supposed to ensure happy relations with the husband for the girl. The temptation is similar to the promises of prayer.

Saraswati joined me in 1926 at Coimbatore. Naturally, her reading was little, but she has

keen understanding and sound commonsense. We kept nothing private, and much less secret between us. On account of openness of relations, we think together and act together in complete harmony.

On joining me, Saraswati left orthodox habits and adopted the atheist attitude. An incident was significant in this context. At Colombo she was pregnant with the first child. When she was carrying the fourth month, there was a solar eclipse in the afternoon. Hindu orthodoxy imposes the disciplines of silence and shutting up in a dark room for pregnant women at the time of any eclipse. Non compliance is threatened with mutilations of the child to be born. But Saraswati saw Buddhist, Moor and Burgher women freely moving about in the streets of Colombo, regardless of the time of the eclipse. Surely, some of these women must be pregnant too. If the evils of infringement were real, all pregnant women should be equally affected and their children should be maimed, irrespective of faiths. But that doesn't happen. Therefore, the disciplines relating to eclipse are a superstition of Hindu faith. Thinking along these lines, Saraswati transgressed the taboos at the time of the eclipse. After the full period, the delivery was normal and the child also was

normal. The experience equipped her with the credit to persuade other pregnant women to give up the superstition. We have nine children now. Both solar and lunar eclipses occurred at different periods of her pregnancies. Nothing untoward happened to us on account of the violations of restrictions imposed by custom on pregnant women during eclipses.

Saraswati's cooperation has been of great assistance to me in growing atheistic. The early steps of atheism were concerned with working against superstitions. Later, when we took up economic and political programmes of atheism, Saraswati rose to the occasion and was repeatedly imprisoned in that connection.

CHAPTER - III

CLASH WITH PARENTS

My parents lived at Kakinada. They were getting old. I desired to be serviceable to them.

When I was born on November 15, 1902 at Chatrapur, now in Orissa, my father, Goparaju Venkata Subbarao, was the head clerk of the Forest Department. He was popularly known as "Sambho" owing to his ardent devotion to the Hindu god, Sambho, that is, Siva. For his skill in draftsmanship and capacity to tackle any volume of work, he was promoted to be the Sheristadar at Parlakemedi, where my elder sister, elder brother and I had elementary education. My father was again transferred to Kurnool. But my brother and I continued our studies at Parlakemedi. Our paternal aunt, who claimed divine revelations, was our guardian.

As frequent transfers, though on promotion, disturbed our studies, my father chose to settle down at Kakinada in the Revenue Department. At Kakinanda, in P. R. College, my brother, Narasimha Rao and I continued our further education. He went for engineering course later on and I went to Madras for my M. A. in Botany at the Presidency College. While I was serving

at Madurai, Coimbatore and Colombo, the condition of my parents was constantly in my view. Presently an opportunity arose. P. R. College at Kakinada opend the degree course of study in Botany, and preferred its alumni for the staff. I accepted lecturership and was happy that I was going to serve my old college and also that I was living with my parents.

But conditions were not so happy as I hoped for. Atheist attitudes markedly changed my ways of life and resulted in clashes with the conservative and conventional methods of my parents and of my alma mater.

My parental aunt continued to go into trances as in the past. Of course, I received "sacred ash" from her when I was a boy. The growth of rational thought changed the picture now.

A fortnight after I came to live in my parental home, I found my aunt in trance in the prayer-room. She was reprimanding my mother on some trifling matter. My father was a strict disciplinarian. My mother was kind and loving to all her eight children. We bore special respect and affection for her. So when I overheard my aunt in trance finding fault with my mother, without a second thought, I broke into the sanctum sanctorum with a stick in my hand and

threatened to thrash my aunt, unless she gave up that nonsense. My father who was sitting before the deity was dumbfounded at my rudeness. The whole situation was suddenly silenced. I withdraw from the room. There were no more trances and revelations afterwards.

The reason for my immediate reaction was my reading of the psychology of Religious Mysticism. I learnt that trances, visions and revelations were either subjective illusions of weak minds under the influence of overpowering auto-suggestions or were pretensions of cheats in the halo of religious belief. The knowledge disabused my mind of respect for my aunt's trances though I performed my duties to her as the elderly woman of the family. Further, the family got into straitened circumstances by following the advice of the so called divine revelations. On return to Kakinada, I could see the loss and trouble suffered by the family. A few years later my father fell out with my aunt. During her last days she came away to me. At an advanced age of over eighty-five, she died at my house at Masulipatam.

After my discourtesy to my aunt in trance, my father was not happy with me. He supposed that the deity of our family possessed my aunt, took her into trance and revealed advice through

inspired utterances. The rudeness to my aunt in trance was considered rudeness to the deity of the family. It was an act of sacrilege. Except my flouting of the religious faith, there was little to find fault with me. Yet, it was not a small matter. He openly remarked that he made a mistake in giving me higher education. He was looking for an opportunity to teach me a lesson.

The full moon of August was the day each year when the sacred thread was ceremoniously changed for a new one. On that day in 1928, my father held out a thread to me and asked me to wear it as a matter of religious discipline and respect for the rules of caste. I had not discarded the thread wholly so far. I was only indifferent to it. But my father's conventional discipline challenged my atheistic leanings. Politely I told him, "Father, I have great regard for you. But I have no respect for caste. For the past two or three years I have been indifferent to wearing the thread, which is a symbol of a caste. But on this day, when the thread is changed for a new one, let me make up my mind and be honest to my convictions. I'll discard the thread wholly from today".

My father was enraged at this defiance of caste. In severe voice, he repeated thrice, "I am your father. I command you. Wear the thread".

It was a moment of test for me. Gently but definitely I replied, "No, please". "Get out of my house. You are a sinner. I won't look at your face," was the harsh command of my father. He turned his face away and walked quickly into his room and shut the door.

I was outcaste. My mother shed tears. I came to Kakinada from Colombo to serve my parents. Atheism estranged me from them. The news spread around. I took a week to secure a house for me to shift from my parent's home. I was not economically hard up, as I was holding a job in the college ; but I was socially alienated from friends and relatives who agreed with my father. My wife and I lived almost alone in the new house with our first child, Manorama. Neighbours looked upon us with suspicion. My mother visited us off and on. Every month I was passing on a part of my salary to my parents to relieve their economic strain.

The Gandhian movement of the Indian National Congress combined constructive work with political fight. It spread throughout the length and bredth of India, and liberalised old traditions of caste and communal differences. In 1920, my father had a part to play in the Gandhian movement He donated two bags of paddy grain to the Congress volunteer camp.

For this act he was suspended from service for one month by the British government. My father was a generous man in many respects. My open apostasy defied his authority as a father and he was angry with me.

After excommunicating me, my father was consulting Hindu high-priests on the propriety of his action. Some of them seemed to have advised him to review caste rules in the light of modren events, especially the Gandhian drive against the observance of untouchability.

One incident settled the issue. Dr. Duriseti Chalapati Rao was our family physician. He belonged to the same caste as my father. On one occasion, my father praised him for observing caste rules and complained against me for disobedience. The doctor, without a word, removed his coat and shirt and revealed that he did not have a thread at that time. He told my father that many young men of the age were indifferent to the caste rules. Only I was bold and honest. Should I be punished for being honest and he be praised for soft compromises with conditions around him? The doctor's performance and pleading set my father to think afresh. My mother's persuasion had its influence too.

After two and half years of excommunication my father called me and my wife for common

dinner with him. Strangely, some orthodox relatives excommunicated my parents for eating with me. A few months later, my parents who were around sixty years of age, shifted to my new house which was more roomy and better ventilated.

I was happy I was serviceble to my parents. I did not interfere with their ways of prayer and worship. Nevertheless, their orthodoxy, was getting relaxed. For some time Saraswati had to adjust between the extremes of somewhat orthodox parents-in-law and heretical husband. She managed it well with tact and patience. My parents spread out their time in living with me, and with my brothers and sisters. We were eight in all. My parents lived up to the ripe old age of ninety, and spent their last days with my younger brother Sambasiva Rao.

My mother spoke at the public function of the celebration of my sixtieth birth day. She recalled the instances of my recalcitrance. With abundant motherly affection she added, "After all, a son is a son."

CHAPTER - IV

THE FIRST DISMISSAL

I was reading extensively for and against atheism. Atheism was not an intellectual understanding with me. I wanted to know how an atheist was different from a theist in the ways of life. It appeared to me that people closed their minds with faith in god and fate. They lost initiative, became superstitious and fanatically cling to their beliefs. But god and fate were beliefs with no basis in reality. They were falsehoods. If we reject them, we stand on our feet, feel free, work well and live equal, since all of us belong to the same kind. With this ambitious plan, I set about my life. I knew I would clash with vested interests and conservative views in the old ways of life. But I would work with no regrets.

At first I started with exposure of superstitions and pulling down sectarian walls. I discarded the sacred thread because it was a caste symbol. As I was a student of science with some wide reading of different branches of knowledge and as I had leisure and held a job which placed me decently above want, I indulged in discussions against superstitions, and accompanied them with demonstrations of simple

scientific experiments. For instance, turmeric with slaked lime turns red. When lemon juice or tamarind paste is added to the red substance, it turns yellow again. The truth is turmeric responds to acid and alkali media. Ignorant of the chemical nature of the reaction, mendicants shroud it in a religious garb and present it as a miracle. Similarly, eclipses are not explained in a scientific way, but are associated with superstitious practices in the name of miracles. Miracles thrive where ignorance prevails. And religious belief closes the mind and becomes the source of dark superstition.

Close to my residence was a slum of untouchables, called Atchutapuram. Untouchables are socially segregated, poor, illiterate and down-trodden. I established contacts with the slum and started an adult night school there on my own accord. But the adults were irregular and slow to take advantage of the school. On studying the situation I found that the immediate need of the adults of the slum was not education but food. Most of them had to work the whole day at odd manual labour. Either they were not paid the wages for the day or they were paid so late that they had to buy foodgrains late and cook for the day to eat. The prospect of obtaining labour for the next day was uncertain and the threat of starvation constantly hovered over them. I learnt

the reality of slum life more than I taught them lessons. And to be real to the common people, atheism should solve the economic problem of India.

The academic life at the college posed its own problems. To mention one, I noticed a student of my class dull and inattentive. I talked to him privately and he said that he had no interest in Botany. Fine. I requested him to think over and tell me the next day the subject in which he had interest so that I could recommend to the principal the change of his subject. He thought over and informed me that he could not fix his interest on any subject. I explained to him that the defect was not with Botany but with his attitude towards life. I encouraged him to continue in Botany class as he had already done three weeks in it. A few days later I held a test for the class and deliberately gave him a good mark. He was surprised and asked me if he was good at the subject. I encouraged him and in the next test he deserved the mark. He passed B. A. in Botany at the first chance. Ten years later, I met Suryanarayana, the same student at a meeting in another district to learn from him that he was teaching Botany in a school and, with a glee in his face, he said he was creating interest in Botany in his students. Supply cheer and man is all right.

There were several occasions for me to seek atheistic solution of the problems of my students, their educational difficulties and domestic troubles. I asked them to feel free as masters of their lives, to take steps towards equality of all humans and to live open without a blush and to tell what we do and to do what we tell. These simple guidelines evoked new enthusiasm among my students. They used to visit me with their families, and my wife and I paid return visits to their homes. The social calls mingled up several of us crossing conventional barriers of caste and communal differences. It was a big change in India in those days before attainment of political independence. I was happy to be with the students both inside and outside the college. The happy relations had a healthy effect on their studies. They paid good attention to what I was teaching and fared well at examinations. Most of them came out brilliantly as professors, legislators, advocates or successful businessmen. Even forty years after the completion of their student career, I keep up good social relations with many of my old students. J. Venkateswarlu, Professor Emeritus of Andhra University, C. V. K. Rao legislator of the State Assembly, Narayana Prasad serving in the United Nations Organisation, Acharyulu a successful accountant at Bombay and T. V. Raghavulu, a former minister,

are some whom I can mention. This wide and abiding sociability I attribute to the atheist way of life.

One of my students, B. V. D. Narayana Rao, started a manuscript magazine. He had a flare for journalism. He requested me for an article on atheism and I wrote one on "The concept of god". I said that the concept of god was useful in three ways. Firstly, it provided a ready answer to every question in the form of god's creation and god's will. Secondly, it supplied a sanction for moral conduct in the form of hope of heaven and fear of hell. Thirdly, it could be moulded conveniently for any theme of fine arts. A large volume of song, dance, painting and sculpture was produced in the name of god. In spite of its usefulness, the concept of god was a falsehood. Like every falsehood, it corrupted mankind by importing superstition and fanaticism into the belief in god. I concluded that though god was a useful falsehood, it should be discarded as every other falsehood in order to promote truthful life and real social harmony.

P. R. College, where I served, was inspired with the ideology of *Brahmooism*, a liberal offshoot of Hinduism Yet avowed atheism was too much of irreligion for the management. The authorities of P. R. College took exception to my expression

of atheist views in the article on 'The Concept of God' and called for my explanation. I replied that I was an atheist by conviction and those were my views. My services were dispensed with after a due notice of three months.

My students moved in the matter and lodged a protest against my dismissal. It was of no avail. After five years of lecturership, I left the services of my alma mater in 1933. Atheism clashed with my parents. Atheism caused my dismissal from the college.

CHAPTER-V

AN EARLY EXPERIMENT

Saraswati and I were discussing every turn of events. But we did not expect the dismissal from P. R. College. For our maintanance we were wholly dependent upon the salary from the college. Our only property was a thatched hut we put up on a plot of land which we purchased by disposing of Saraswti's ornaments. The landlord of the house we were living in after getting excommunicated by the parents, took advantage of our social odium and was frequently demanding higher rent. So we thought of putting up a hut of our own. It was on the outskirts of the town with open fields around. My parents joined us in that hut.

My father drew a pension on retirement from government service. As I was economically depressed on losing the job at the college, my parents chose to go on a long visit of relatives in other districts. I had three young chidren by that time.

Of course, we were hard hit by the dismissal. But that did not unnerve us. We chose to go the atheist way. It was uncharted. We should be prepared for risks and untoward incidents. We

are the masters of our lives. We cannot complain. We should chose our course of life and act with freedom and a sense of responsibility.

Equipped with hope and confidance, I decided to start a tutorial college. It was a private institution to coach students for public examinations. Some of my old students who had graduated by then came to my assistance. We were fourteen in number. We gave the name of 'Andhra Tutorial College' to the institution. A friend of mine who sympathised with our venture, let out a portion of his house for a small rent to locate the tutorial college. All the fourteen of us did all the work ourselves, from sweeping the premises to teaching the students. It was a successful beginning in cooperative living. We divided the income from fees equally among us. My share of the income was a tenth of what I got at P. R. College. I cut the coat according to the cloth and Saraswati wonderfully rose to the occasion.

All my colleagues were not atheists. They appreciated my atheist way of life. M. Bhaskara Rama Rao, who was my student at P. R. College, was very much attached to me. His early death deprived me of a valuable friend.

Mrs. Durgabai, who later gained reputation as Dr. Durgabai Deshmukh, was a student of the

Andhra Tutorial College. By that time she was in the forefront as the leader of the Congress Movement. In 1930 33 she was the dictator of the Satyagraha camp at Madras. She underwent long terms of imprisonment. When the political movement took a turn for constructive work, she desired to acquire academic knowledge by regular study. She sought my help in the matter.

While I was teaching her, she often fell into a reminiscent mood and related to me her experiences of political fights and prison life. She introduced me to several political dignitaries. At her instance, I served as a personal volunteer of Mahatma Gandhi when he visited Kakinada during his Harijan tour of India. Running of the adult night school at Atchutapuram acquainted me with the realities of the economic conditon of the slums. Teaching Durgabai stimulated my interest in political life. The experiences were useful to me when I added economic and political dimensions to atheism.

Durgabai was not only a political worker of eminence. She was interésted in problems of widow remarrige and inter caste marriages. Saraswati and I were with her in her activities. Putsala Satyanarayana, of Uppada, who later became a legislator, was our close associate. Working in the field revealed to us practical

difficulties in the way of social reform. The first hurdle was the parents of the parties to the marriage. Then the public would be willing to help but afraid to commit themselves to any specific act of assistance. Looking at the difficulties, the prospective bride or the bridegroom would withdraw suddenly from the scene of action. Amidst these uncertainties, one has to work with patience and resolve. Suramma was a widow who steadfastly braved the ordeal and married successfully. Some of those who helped us greatly for the consummation of the marriage, were unwilling to sit for a photograph with the newly married couple. They would help, but they would not like to be known publicly as helpers of a reform. Saraswati and I were the common hosts for every marrige feast of unconventional alliance.

Indeed work at the Andhra Tutorial College opend to me opportenities of social and political significance which service at P. R. College could not. Salaried security of jobs and freedom of work and expression do not go together. Freedom is certainly attendent with risks. Its ups and downs stand in marked contrast with the unifromity of weekly wages or monthly salaries. But this uniformity is the enemy of initiative and innovation. If I chose the

freedoom of atheism, I should take the uncertainties that go with it. If I continued at the Tutorial College, perhaps, I could have developed activities that would put atheism to test. That was my dreem also. But the sudden dismissal from P. R. College and the meagre income from the Tutorial College imposed such a financial strain on me and Saraswati that we agreed to take help from a strange quarter that delayed the strait experiment with atheism for six years. When one of my position and devotion to atheism was tempted by desire for security even for a while, the pressure of economic conditions should be so enormous and enslaving as to border on economic determinism in the case of common people. How then are people to be released from this pressure? Some have got to withstand the economic conditioning, and change the order. They are atheists who can change the order instead of succumbing to it. Atheists are masters of systems but not slaves of systems. But I should admit, I yielded to the pressure and took six years to rebel against it.

My dismissal from P. R. College evoked wide sympathy from several quarters. The cocperation from my collegues at the tutorial college was an aspect of it. Further, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, who later on became President of India, was Vice-

Chancellor of the Andhra University at that time. P. R. College was affiliated to the Andhra University. He was known for his liberal views and acts of generosity. He was not an atheist. But he thought that a lecturer of a college should not be persecuted for unorthodox leanings. With his recommendation, the subject of Botany was opend at Hindu College, Musulipatam and I was offered the post of lecturership. I took it up. After a year of work at the tutorial college, I shifted to a regular college again.

CHAPTER – VI

THE SECOND DISMISSAL

A flood of letters congratulated me on my appointment as lecturer in Botany at Hindu College, Masulipatam. They thought when I was dismissed from P. R. College on the score of atheism, the present appointment was a moral victory for my cause. The tutorial college at Kakinada gave me a send-off and my colleagues continued the college for a few more years.

The principal at Hindu College, Masulipatnam, K. Sivarama Krishna Rao was kind to me. As I was known as an atheist on my appointment, there was no room for misunderstanding. Further, Sivarama Krishna Rao himself was considered a non-conformist and there was much in common between us.

The work at Hindu College was light for me. I was already a teacher for nine years. Further, the course of Botany was just started and I taught only Intermediate classes here whereas I handled B. Sc. classes at P. R. College. I utilized my spare time for the spread of atheism.

Practically, every weekend I used to go out to address public meetings on atheism. In two

years I visited most of the villages around Masulipatam and in adjacent districts also. Usually I spoke for two hours and at the end invited questions. The answers lasted for another two hours. It was natural for me to stand the strain of a four – or five – hour meeting as I was inspired with the zeal of spreading atheism. But what encouraged me was the response of the gathering which stayed all the time and asked me questions also with interest. The longest meeting lasted for seven hours from 1 to 8 P.M. at Duggirala (Guntur District). That was in 1937.

The theme of my talks was to say that god, soul and other-worlds were false. I treated with god, soul and other-worlds in general rather than limiting myself to Hindu, Christian or Islamic concept of them. As the audience was mixed, questions often related to denominational faith to which the questioner belonged. Questions and cross-questions of different denominations themselves revealed that no denomination was wholly valid. My general reading of all religions enabled me to meet every question with confidence. The questions were usually forty to fifty. I recollect the largest number was 136 at Anantapur. The answering of questions clarified my understanding of atheism and also gave me a picture of people's faith, its form and use.

The meetings were attended in hundreds. There was no disturbance at meetings, except at Phirangipuram (Guntur District) which is a stronghold of Catholics. The elders of the village disapproved of the disturbance and arranged the meeting again the next day in quieter atmosphere with bigger audience.

A particular feature of meetings on atheism was the punctuality of its start. Indian villagers who are not used to machines, take time leisurely. Meetings usually start hours late. One of the early meetings was at Challapalli. It was announced at 1 P. M. and was widely advertised by placards and handbills. The place was a cinema hall. I went there five minutes before time. The convener too was not there. About ten persons were in the hall. I drew a chair, announced myself and started the meeting punctually at 1 P. M. by my watch. Five people ran out of the hall to call in the people who came for the meeting but were loitering in the streets or sitting in coffe-houses. Within half an hour the hall was full. The convener also rushed in. There was a loud protest that I should not have started the meeting without the full audience. "Though 1 P. M. was the time announced, we have to wait for the audience. It may mean 2 P.M. also" was the argument of the convener. I simply replied, "One may

mean two for theists. For atheists one means one." The reply caught the imagination of the people. Thereafter, every meeting on atheism was punctually attended.

Educational institutions at that time were conventional and joboriented. Mahatma Gandhi characterised them as "mills to manufacture clerks". The atheist mind was eager to change every existing system and custom with a view to make them more free, equitable and social. I thought of a college to be managed by students and teachers, free of commercial interests. The new college would encourage initiative, social mingling and technical skill. There was response from the public of Bhimavaram, a town of the adjoing district to sponsor such a college. A committee was formed. I was its principal member, since I put forth the plan. The university required the collection of a hundred thousand rupees for the college for granting affiliation. Five thousand rupees were readily subscribed and the members of the committee started collecting further donations.

An elderly gentleman was attracted by the plan of the college. He wanted to donate sixty thousand rupees. Fine. He showed me his bank book with a balance of seventy two thousand rupees. The other twelve thousand he would

keep for his expenses during the rest of his life. He imposed no condition or wish for the donation except one. He wanted me to wear the "sacred thread". He said that, because I was a moving figure of the committee, students would flout rules of caste by my example. At once my eyes were opend to the reality. I was working in a caste ridden climate. Politely I told the gentleman, "I am not fit for this work. I shall resign from the committee. Please pass on your kind donation to the president of the committee." The elderly gentleman advised me to be considerate. Sixty thousand rupees was more than half the amount we were to collect for the college. But atheism was more to me than the bright prospect of establishing the college of my dream. He would give the donation only if I remained on the committee. It was an impossible condition. I resigned from the committee. The political movement in the country raged again. Some members of the committee took part in it. The interest to establish the college receded into the background. Later, another of the convetional type came up at Bhimavaram.

A big section of the youth were attracted towards Marxism. They resorted to the method of strikes. There were frequent student strikes at Hindu college too. The management thought

that my atheist propaganda was indirectly responsible for the strikes. It resolved to dispense with my services. After five years at Hindu College, I faced the second dismissal in 1939.

Students took up my cause. They approached all the members of the management and successfully prevailed upon them to revoke the order of dismissal. But the principal was not happy, when the management yielded to the student pressure. In his capacity as the principal, he imposed disciplinary regulations on me, prohibiting me from meeting students outside the class-room and banning the expression of my views on atheism inside or outside the college, in speech or writing.

The ban was too much for me. Should I resign immediately? The students who fought in my behalf to get the dismissal order revoked, did not want me to resign. It was shameful for me to serve under a ban. I agreed to stay for a year and to resign at the end of the academic year in 1940.

The two dismissals plainly placed the choice before me between atheism and job. Saraswati and I chose atheism. In fact, the principal did not accept my resignation at once. He knew that I added two more children to my family, six by

now. He was kind to me when he started the course of Botany in the Hindu College and took me as a lecturer after I was dismissed from P. R. College. He was kind again to remind me of my responsibilities to the family and to advise the withdrawal of my resignation. It was a question of prestige for him when I suggested that the ban on me should be lifted. There was no common ground between us if I valued freedom to spread atheism more than the security of a job. The resignation was accepted.

CHAPTER - VII

TO A VILLAGE

When I resigned the job at Hindu College, Masulipatam, I had before me some choices for the next step. I was offered the secretaryship of a Life Insurance Company. A scientific company asked me to take charge of their section of Biology. The manager and correspondent of a High School wanted me to take up its headmastership, which fell vacant just a few days ago. These were the jobs with security of service and salary. There was the other offer of public work. Anne Anjayya invited me to settle down in his village of Mudunur (Krishna District) and to carry on public work in the manner I liked.

Everytime in life we face alternatives for choice. The final choice depends upon the objective of life, either rolling in the conventional rut or the desire for a change and taking risks of a change. Atheist thought that took shape during the several lectures and answering of questions, made it plain to me that every individual has the freedom of choice. It is the fear of responsibility that follows the choice, which compromises the individual to conventional ruts and permits him conventionally to shift the responsibility of the results of choice to god's

will, fate's decree, force of circumstances, inexorable custom, economic condition, political necessity or the cultural pattern. Whatever the plea, it is a question of owning responsibility of choice or shifting responsibility of choice to some agent outside the individual. I recognised that the tendency to shift the responsibility of choice is the theist way of life and the opposite, namely, the boldness and frankness to own responsibility of choice is the atheist way of life. Atheists assert the freedom to make choice everytime and to face the consequences without regrets and with a sence or responsibility. If the results prove unpleasant, the individual is as free to change the choice as he was to choose earlier. Throughout, it is a question of asserting freedom with a sense of responsibility and using freedom under the cover of faith in an external force that is supposed to determine choice and the results of choice.

Saraswati and I were clear in our minds. I had already worked for fifteen years from 1925 to 1940 as a lecturer in five different colleges. The atheist disciplines do not agree with theist conventions. I faced two dismissals. Why should I accept a salaried job again to repeat the same clashes or to compromise with conventional ways for fear of clashes? So, we chose to accept

Anjayya's invitation to go to Mudunur. The choice is attendent with risk but it has the scope for the expression of freedom with a sense of responsibility. With six children ranged from twelve to a year in age, Saraswati and I went to Mudunur in August 1940.

Mudunur had a population of about 3,000, two miles from the nearest road and eight miles from the nearest town, Gudivada, which has a railway station. It had a branch post-office, an elementary school and a dispensary. Communications and facilities have improved considerably after India became independent, but Mudunur was a typical village when we went there. Anjayya was its accredited leader by virtue of his liberal disposition and a sense of service and sacrifice. He was a freedom fighter in the Gandhian movement of 1930 33.

Saraswati and I were born and bred up in towns. My job as a lecturer in colleges confined me to towns. Except for addressing meetings on atheism, I had little contact with villages. Therefore, Mudunur gave us a valuable opportunity to know village life, especially because more than eighty per cent of India's population lives in villages. Those who do not know villages do not know India largely.

Mudunur was one of the villages where I addressed a meeting on atheism two years ago. I had a few acquaintances and I was known there. Further, at the instance of Anjayya, Mudunur received us kindly and maintained the family collectively. Two thatched huts were put up for us in a private land just outside the village. It was called the Atheist Centre. From there we carried out our activities tlll 1947 when we shifted to Patamata, (Vijayawada).

It was a wonderful experience for those seven years when everyone looked after our needs in general and no one was responsible to us in particular. A friend would send us his milch buffalo and another hay to feed her. We enjoyed the milk. We received cereals and pulses by collective donation and clothes when we needed them. Vegetable groweres who carried gourds and greens in the early hours of the morning to the market in the town, would drop a few vegetables at our hut on their way. Thankfully we collected them at day-break. The omnibus on the road gave us a lift to the town free of charge and somebody would buy us postage for correspondence. Our needs were met in kind and seldom we had the occasion to handle a coin. Special mention should be made of Puvvala Nagabhushanam who was theistic himself, but was

attracted towards the atheistic way of life and actively took care of us all the years we were at Mudunur.

The first programme I took up at Mudunur was the running of Adult Education School. 86 adults ranging from 20 to 70 years of age from Mudunur and neighbouring villages formed the class which met in a shed on the tank bund. The class sat from 12 noon to 2 p. m. punctually, a time suitable to villagers engaged in farm work, and to teachers of elementary schools. Anjayya also attended the class. I formulated a syllabus of the fundamentals of all subjects, arts and sciences taught ordinarily in colleges. My wide reading for atheism enabled me to take the class in all subjects. Prof. N. G. Ranga spared me volumes of Encyclopaedia Britannica for reference. History, economics, politics, philosophy, sociology, ethics, logic, fine arts, geography, physics, chemistry, biology, geology, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, engineering and elements of all subjects were in our course of study. It was a pleasure to acquaint the villagers with the fundamentals of all the subjects in their familiar language. It was a training for me too. It was interesting, indeed. Side by side with this education, the students who were drawn from all castes and religions of the village, brahmins and untouchables, Hindus, Christains and Muslims,

grouped into twos and three and played the host for the rest at tea by turns every Saturday evening. The teas mingled up all castes in their homes, Brahmin houses or untouchable slums. The social mix-up raised an uproar, but the band of 86 adults braved the opposition.

The experience of common teas encouraged us plan a cosmopolitan meal in the untouchable slum in the month of February, 1941. The invitation was open with a small fee towards cost of food. There were about 260 guests. It was a big affair in a village where caste-distinctions were rigid. Elderly women, including Ramanamma, Anjayya's mother took part in the common dinner. But it was not without an echo.

M. Suryam, M. Krishnarao, M. Suryarao and Dr. S. Subbarao were the Brahmin participants of the common dinner in the untouchable slum. Suryam had two children too. When they returned home after the dinner, their parents closed the doors on them, as eating in untouchable slum was an affront to the rules of caste.

The four had the sympathy of the village with them though their parents were stubborn. For a week they stayed with their friends. In the meantime, there was rethinking of the

problem by the parents and the boys were readmitted into their homes without any condition.

A few years later, M. Suryam became an agent of Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. His cosmopolitan views and acts stood him in good stead. He mingled freely with his clientele without reservations of caste distinctions. Consequently he won wide sympathy, expanded business rapidly and rose to high position in the company. He not only developed into a good businessman but served as an active propagandist of atheism, frequently recalling the incidents of audult class and common dinners.

CHAPTER - VIII

ATHEIST AWAKENING

The adult class gave me wide contacts in and around Mudunur. Adiraju Amruteswararao, a teacher, attended the class with a few of his students from Appikatla, two miles away. From Bollapadu and Marrivada, villages on the other side also, there were regular adults at the school. Perumal pedalled 16 miles on bicycle to and fro between Mudunur and Gudivada town to attend the classes. There was general sympathy and respect for atheism.

Anne Anjayya gave a fillip to the atheist movement by persuading Ramakumar Varma to hold a conference of atheists. It was held in 1941, at Kanumur, a village eight miles from Mudunur. It was attended by about three hundred delegates and the conference had free discussion during its three days. Tummala Gopala Krishnayya was the secretary of the committee that was formed to spread atheism. He took me round several villages for meetings on atheism.

Movva Sivarao of Mudunur, undertook to print and publish my book in Telugu on Atheism (Nastikatvamu). In that book I used the neuter

gender for god, because god is a concept. The change from the accustomed masculine gender attracted attention and set about rethinking. The book went through three reprints.

Wherever I was called for a public meeting, I insisted on my lodge and board to be arranged in the local untouchable slum. I took the occasion to mingle the two sects among untouchbles, *Mala* and *Madiga*. Ordinarily, they do not interdine nor they draw water from the same well. I consider their mingling an achievement for the atheist way of life.

At Mudunur I demonstrated fire-walking and dispelled the superstition associated with it. There is a notion that one could walk on fire only after a religious ceremony, as it was done. My wife and I walked on fire without the ceremony. My son Lavanam who was a boy of ten also walked. A few villagers, including women followed us. It was strange. To the huge gathering that assembled to witness the fire-walking by atheists, I explained the scientific principle involved in firewalking. When fire is super hot, the moisture on the skin of the sole gets immediately converted into vapour. It acts as the insulating layer between the skin and the fire during the short interval of two or three rapid strides on the pit of fire. Only care should be

taken to see that the fuel burns for a sufficiently long time to get super heated.

Similarly with the magnet from some machines in villages, I demonstrated the phenomena of attraction and repulsion. Some cheats use them for exhibiting peace and war between dolls of gods of mythology.

On the occasion of an eclipse, Saraswati gathered pregnant women of the village and dispelled the superstition associated with it, as she did in Colombo.

The social mingling through common teas and dinners on the one hand and the scientific explanation and exploding of superstitions through demonstrations on the other, created a new awakening among the people of Mudunur and the surrounding villages. They moved with an open mind and revised old habits.

Puvvala Suryam is a musician of Mudunur. He made a living by playing on violin. He was attracted by the atheist ideology. He found that songs of classical music bore themes in praise of god. He was unwilling to propagate theistic thought through his music. He discarded the violin and started to live by hard physical labour. He became an example of an ernest atheist. A scholar of another village was attracted by

Suryam's example. He composed songs with humanist and rationalist themes and Suryam entertained atheist audiences with the new songs.

Yellamanchili Butchayya, a young man of Mudunur wanted to marry intercaste to set an example for the abolition of caste distinctions. He married Puvvala Suryam's daughter on principle in the teeth of opposition of his relatives. Kaviraj Tripuraneni Ramaswamy of high repute as a non-conformist, iconoclast and rationalist, presided over the largely attended marriage function. Movva Pichayya and Kolli Ramamohanarao celebrated their marriages discarding religious rites and holding cosmopolitan dinners and inviting local untouchables too. Marriage by civil registration became popular among atheists. My brother, Sambasivarao's marriage with a widow in the orthodox village of Kanakavalli, with untouchables sitting along with others for lunch was a big social revolution in those days in the context of prevailing Hindu caste-convictions. A riot was feared. But the opposition of conservatives did not take shape in the light of atheist awakening.

The atheist awakening revised the personel habits of villagers. Indian villages are known for insanitation. Soil-pollution has been an age-old bad habit with them. Atheist awakening

opened their eyes to the uncleanliness and indecency contained in it and men and women in several homes took to the construction and use of trench latrines. In this respect an item of the constructive programme of Mahatma Gandhi came to our help.

The sympathy for atheism spread so wide and deep into the minds of people that in the census of 1941, from Mudunur village 142 persons classified themselves as atheists, disowning labels of caste and religion. Ramaseshayya incurred the displeasure of the Sub-Registar when he refused to associate himself with a label of caste or religion for additional identification at the time of registering a document. Similar was the experience of witnesses in courts of law A small provision which went unnoticed so long, had to be culled out in order to meet the demands of the atheists. It provided an alternative to the usual oath in the name of god. By such bold and consistent action of the villagers, Mudunur soon came to be known as the "godless village".

It is a common view that theism, and its opposite atheism also, are concerned with philosophical questions, personal discipline and social conduct have little to do with political and economic affairs. That was the case in primitive

times when political and economic systems had not developed significantly and religious faith dominated the life of the people. In the modern age, things have changed considerably. Emphasis has shifted to economic and political affairs. The old view is out moded. To be a real way of life, atheism should concern itself with all aspects of life and especially with economic and political systems because political authority and state law control and regulate social relations more than religious faith does in the modern age. From care of children and mode of education to family planning and rate of immigration, from irrigation facilities and land distribution to food rationing and property rights, state law rules in the modren age. Therefore, we atheists wanted to bring political and economic affairs into the purview of atheism. The occasion of Quit India Movement of 1942 came in handy.

Earlier in 1941 Mahatma Gandhi conducted the movement of Individual Satyagraha as a silent protest against India's involvement in the Second World War. We were discussing its progress in our adult school. At that time, Anjayya was more interested in the methods of Subhas Chandra Bose than in the ways of Mahatma Gandhi. So he joined the Forward Bloc of Bose. When Bose was known to have left India to woo the help of

Germany for winning India's freedom, British government arrested associates of Bose. Anjayya went underground and was later detained in Deoli gaol till 1945. On account of the political changes, we discontinued the Adult School after a year and planned to take part in the Quit India Movement.

By 1942, other workers had gathered at the Atheist Centre. Prominent among them were Kana, D. Ramaswamy, T. Challayya, D. Tatayya and R. Arjuna Rao. They expressed their agreement with atheism and its political programme. Some students of the Adult School also joined us in the political action. We formed a good team of Satyagrahis in the Quit India Movement. Saraswati, my daughter Manorama and my sister Samrajyam were among the women who were arrested. Ours was the largest single batch in Krishna District to suffer imprisonment. Kana, Tatayya and Chellayya were imprisoned twice between 1942 and 44. In Alipuram Camp Jail I talked frequently to groups of fellow-prisoners on atheism. They belong to the four Southern language groups of Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada.

Political action broadened the base of atheistic thought and prison life gained for us wider acquiantance.

CHAPTER - IX

MY CHILDREN

I have nine children, five daughters and four sons. The number is outrageous from the point of view of the needs of family planning in capitalist society. Strangely, in socialist society, not only mothers of many children are honoured and special allowance is granted for proper nurture of each child but childless mothers are taxed. Motivation of private profit presnts norms different from collective welfare of socialist society.

Mahatma Gandhi was surprised at the large number of my children especially because I live by public support after 1940. He asked me why I was not observing celibacy. I said that I did not like to raise an artificial barrier between my wife and my self, especially when I denied her caste and property. If I denied myself also to her, I would give scope for inhibitions that disturb harmonious relations. Gandhi appreciated my situation and remarked that I was novel in having a large family without private property in public work.

From a rationalist standpoint, I should have taken to contraceptives, if I did not like celibacy.

But effective measures of contraception were not commonly procurable in India in the thirties and forties of this century. When vasectomy became handy, I got sterilized in 1948. Nevertheless, on account of the atheist way of life we have bestowed sufficient care on our children so that they grow as assets to atheism.

Our atheist outlook was reflected even in giving names to our children.

The first is daughter born in 1928. Except for defying the ban of eclipse, Saraswati and I had not grown assertively atheist. So we adopted the name of *Manorama* for her, a name suggested by our friend Dr. Aserappa of Colombo.

The second is a son, born in 1930. We were outcaste by that time and we grew atheistic. That was the time of the Salt Satyagraha Movement launched by Gandhi. So we called him *Lavanam,* which means salt in Indian languages.

The third is *Mythri*, another daughter. She was born in 1932, the period of Gandhi-Irwin pact and the Secound Round Table Conference in London. Climate of friendship was prevailing at that time and Mythri means friendship.

Vidya is the fourth child and third daughter. She was born in 1934 when I was trying the

experiment with education in Andhra Tutorial College. Vidya means education.

The second son and the fifth child is *Vijayam*. Vijayam means success, for Congress scored a sweeping success in 1937 elections, when he was born.

The third son is *Samaram*, meaning war. He was born in 1939, the time when the second world war started.

The next son is *Niyanta* born in 1941. Niyanta means dictator. That was the year of dictatorships of Hitler and Mussolini. Gandhi was also made the dictator of the Congress to conduct the anti-war satyagraha.

The eighth child, a daughter, is *Maru*. The name means "change" in Telugu language. She was born in 1944. when there was a change in the Congress programme from Satyagraha struggle to constructive work.

The last child is *Nau*, a daughter. Nau means nine. She is the ninth child born in 1947.

The novelty of names attracted some of my friends who also gave their children names like 'Agust' for the child born in August 1942 when the August Movement of Quit India started. When we were released from prison in 1943 the child of a friend of mine was given the name of

'Viduthala', which means release. My grand daughter is called Suez, because she was born in 1956 at the time of the Suez crisis and her brother is named Chunav which means elections as he was born in 1952 when India conducted the first general elections with universal adult suffrage.

Some atheists changed their names into Kana, Nara, Madhu, Vempo, Bhanu etc., to dissociate from caste and religious association.

As both Saraswati and I are atheists, the children have grown in an atmosphere of atheism and they have not so far felt the need to complain against it. Just as I discarded the thread which is a mark of the caste, Saraswati cast aside her tilak (rouge on forehead) and '*Mangalasutra*' which are symbols of Hindu wifehood. When Saraswati and I discarded the marks of caste and the symbols of religion, our children too followed suit by training when young, and by understanding as grown ups. Their attitude of action and adjustment without complaint made them sociable and useful members of the family and of the society. Since 1940 when I left my job, my wife and I have been living on public subscription. It gladly maintained my children too and in the long run they have been offered ample facilities for development.

Besides food and clothing, an important problem with children is their education in a country which does not provide for social welfare. At Mudunur, Tummala Ramarao, took special care to give elementary education to my children. Then all of them studied Hindi. Gandhian movement created facilities for the spread of Hindi free of charge. Lavanam gained proficiency in Hindi. Vajayam and Samaram passed highest examinations in Hindi.

Mrs. Durgabai who had established Andhra Mahila Sabha in Madras kindly offered to give regular education to my children in that institution. Lavanam and Mythri went to Madras for that purpose. But their education suffered a setback owing to bombing at Madras and the consequent evacuation in connection with the Second World War. Lavanam did not continue education further as he did not like to study in the British educational system. What attainment he has, is due to self-cultivation. He is well acquainted with Hindi, Telugu and English to speak on public platforms and to write articles in journals. Lavanam was picked up to interpret Vinoba's Hindi talks into Telugu during his tour of Andhra Pradesh. In my foot march with my associates from Sevagram to Delhi in 1961-62, he interpreted my English speeches into Hindi.

Manorama stopped with elementary education after her marriage. Yet she received training in social work and nursing at the centres of Kasturiba Memorial Trust and worked for a few years in slum areas. Other children studied Matriculation privately and qualified themselves for further education. Mythri passed M.A. and Vidya did B. A. by private study. When we shifted to Patamata from Mudunur, Maris Stella Women's college was close to us and the other daughters and grand-daughters studied B. Sc there, partly with the help of friends and partly with the assistance of scholarship grant for the children of those who were imprisoned in the freedom movement. With the same help Vijayam and Niyanta passed M. A. and M. Sc. at the Andhra University. Special mention should be made of the kindness of Mr. J.S.R.L. Narayanamurty, who was a lecturer and who gave Vijayam and Niyantha free food and lodge during their study at the Andhra University. Samaram completed his Medical course with the help given by Mr. Ch. Seshagirirao. Mr. Seshagirirao, who married Vidya, my third daughter later on, has been a source of constant help to us for every need. Maru too studied Medicine with the help of Dr. Sushila Nayyar, who was a secretary of Mahatma Gandhi and became the Health Minister of the Central Government.

A pleasant surprise came from Dr. George Willoughby of USA. During his tour in India, he visited Atheist Centre at Patamata and was pleased with the way of our life. He arranged for education of my children in Philadelphia, USA for a year each by turns. Thus Lavanam, Vijayam, Niyanta and Nau took the chances to go to U.S.A. Just as Narayanamurty helped Vijayam and Niyantha at the Andhra University, Mr. MaturuSurya Prakasam uf Vijayanagaram kindly helped Vijayam to go to USA.

Thus all the children have education or educational training by the help of friends and of public sub scription. We are beholden to them. Also my children who are now qualified for holding jobs, choose to seek self-employment only and be helpful to the needy. They see from my experiences that a job impedes freedom of action and initiative. In capitalist set-up desire for private profit tempts talent and honesty with security of a salaried job and uses their services for furthering profits. The high salaries offered for service depletes free society of talent and honesty and this weakens revolt against capitalist exploitation. Every seeker of jobs is an accomplice of exploiters. So movements for social change give a call for those in jobs to come out, sacrifice comfort and join the struggle for revolution.

CHAPTER-X

WITH GANDHI

My association with Mahatma Gandhi is a hotly debated question with some rationalists. They see no common point between an avowed atheist and a man of god, as Gandhi called himself. Of course Gandhi did say that a blade of grass would not mave without god's behest. What then is its congruity with his unique method of Satyagraha which calls on every one to insist on what he feels to be the truth? It was this method of Satyagraha or non-violent resistence that roused millions of Indians against odds to fight against the forces of British imperialism. Was it god's command or Gandhi's call to action?

To resolve this apparent paradox I wrote to Gandhi in 1930. I went to him in 1944. My talks with him were narrated in the book, *An Atheist With Gandhi* (60 pages, Navajivan Publishers, Ahmedabad). 24 pages of the book were taken up by the Introduction by Kishorelal Mushruwala, a close associate of Gandhi.

I said in my book that Gandhi "was pre-eminently a practical man. As a practical man, he took any situation as it obtained with all its paradoxes. He never sat down to scan and to

sift its cotradictions intellectually, but he moved the whole situation towards the ideal of happiness for all mankind. He condemned nothing before hand lest a good cause should be lost by bad judgment. He only let things drop when they could not bear the strain of progress. Practice was his test of fitness. He subordinated intellectual and setimental considerations to practical purposes. He tested a system of medicine by the cure it effected. He tested the advocate of the cause by the wrok he turned out." (page 56 57) The emphasis on practice was the meeting point between Gandhi and myself.

Two instances confirmed the commonness.

When I was with Gandhi at the Sevagram Ashram, "I wanted to dissect a frog to demonstrate the phenomenon of heart-beat to the nurses class which I was teaching. The nurses objected to the dissection on the ground that it went against the principle of non-violence (ahimsa). The matter was referred to Bapuji (Gandhi) and he replied, "Dissect the frog, if that is the only way to explain the heart-beat." "And I dissected the frog." (An Atheist With Gandhi - Page 40).

Compare this incident with what happened at Ananda College, Colombo. I wanted to dissect a frog to demonstrate heart–beat to my students

of class of Human Physiology. Buddhist priests on the management of the college prevented me from the dissection on the plea that it was killing. The priests eat meat. They say that they do not kill but buy meat from the stall. The priests are speciously argumentative. Gandhi was honestly practical.

The other instance related to my daughter, Manorama's marriage with Arjunarao. She wanted to marry an "Untouchable" on principle in order to establish castelessness. Gandhi agreed to get the marriage performed in Sevagram Ashram, as it conformed to his vow of blessing marriages between untouchables and non untouchables only. He also accepted to replace mention of god with truth, in deference to the needs of my atheism. Further, my wife, children and atheist associates did not attend the regular prayers of Sevagram Ashram. Gandhi did not mind our absence. Evidently, doing work was more important to him than repeating the name of god.

Why then did Gandhi conduct prayers so regularly and mention god so frequently? The reason is clear. He was conventionally a believer in god by early training, even as I was. He continued the habit in so far as it did not stand in the way of his work. He was more concerned

with real practice of progrmmes than with intellectual perfecting of principles. Nevertheless he did not hesitate to revise an old habit whenever a present situation needed the change. He started with the common *Raghupati Raghava* type of god. As he pushed forward, he held that god was truth. But in 1931 he said, "I went a step further and said Truth is God. You will see the fine distinction between the two statements, namely, that God is Truth and Truth is God. In fact it is more correct to say that Truth is God, than to say that God is Truth." He made the change in order to meet the objection of rationalist workers. In 1925 itself when a conscientious objector protested against the mention of god in the Congress pledge, Gandhi answered, "So far as the conscientious objection is concerned, the mention of God may be removed, if required from the Congress pledge of which I am proud to think I am the author. Had such an objection been raised at the time, I would have yielded at once." In the case of my daughter's marriage, he droped the mention of god altogther from the pledge.

Therefore, Gandhi was not that superstitious as he appeared to be by the conduct of prayers. Leading millions of illiterate, downtrodden and tradition-bound common people of India towards

the goal of Swaraj or freedom, he was "hastening slowly" in changing old ways which were of no immediate concern. At the meeting of the Harijan Sevak Sangh in 1946, he described himself by saying, "It is one thing for me to hold certain views and quite another to make my views acceptable in their entirety by the society at large. My mind is ever growing, ever moving forward. All may not keep pace with it. I have, therefore, to exercise the utmost patience and be satisfied with hastening slowly." Change, he wanted; but he chose the speed of change. Confronted with the ghastly situation of Hindu-Muslim clashes in 1947, he chose to change the form of prayer and added the name of Muslim god, Allah, in the Hindu verse. The change raised a strom of protest from Hindu quarters. Gandhi stood firm. He fell to the bullets of a Hindu assassin.

Gandhi called himself a "Sanatan Hindu". In essence he was not a Hindu. He was basically a Human. In the sea of humanity, a human is a rarity. Cut up by labels of race and nationality, class and culture, caste and religion, humanity has become highly sectarian. There is hardly a place for a human to live. So Gandhi was eliminated.

Emphasis on practice as the test of truthfulness, openness of mind for progressive change

and humanness transcending were the characterisitcs of Gandhi that took me to him. Similar features of atheism made me and atheists acceptable to him though we did not attend prayers and called god a flasehood. But the difference was there. (page 52, An Atheist with Gandhi). Gandhi's method of continuing conventional belief in god, however open, had the advantage of establishing immediate communication with the mass of people. Later, it suffered the reaction of losing the essence of change and holding to the form of belief. The Atheist method, on the contrary, raises initial prejudices and renders communication difficult. Yet, the change achieved, however slow, is stable and firm. Gandhi appreciated the content of atheism. He advised me to take another name instead of atheism in view of the heap of prejudice against it.

Convetionally, atheism is equated with wickedness. Yet, I take to it delibrately for its promise to bring about permanent change for human welfare. Atheists have a hard way to fight through, but every step they take is a definite gain to humanity.

CHAPTER – XI

POLITICAL ACTION

Early atheist programmes were similar to Gandhi's Constructive work. While the Constructive programme of Gandhi was linked with the political fight of the Congress and had therefore a nation wide significace, our work of adult education or village sanitation or removal of untouchability or women's liberation was intensively confined to a few villages. In a way, it was even non-political, as we had not proceded sufficiently far to come into touch with or to clash with political authority. We moved in the thin margin outside the direct authority of the government. But as our work widend, we did clash with the conservative and capitalist ways of the government, and we found the need of political action. Political action becomes indispensable in the modren age if social work should be free and broad. Gandhi told Ramaswamy, an atheist, that he (Gandhi) was not a politician. He was essentially a man of religion and a social reformer, and to the extent political factors have come in his way he had been unwillingly drawn into political spehere. (An Atheist with Gandhi – page 28).

Despite the fact that our social work in Mudunur village was intensive, it was not so abiding as we wished. No doubt, Mudunur Suryam became a successful Insurance agent, Nagulapalli Sitaramaiah became a social worker of repute and Kalapala Suryam became a legislator. They are all the products of the adult school and active participants in the work at Mudunur. Also untouchability is relaxed there to a great extent. But in the very village which was know to be "the godless village" and in which 142 classified themselves as atheists in 1941 census, religious cermonies are reappearing. Evedently social work without political legislation loses strength. The same is the experience with the several constructive activities of Gandhi during the fight for freedom. The lasting contribution of the Congress movement is the political freedom of India but not social change by constructive work. Of cource, political work without constructive work is blind; at the same time, the results of constructive work without political action are short-lived. So we added political action to social work and continued social work along with political action.

Our active politics started when we participated in the Quit India movement in 1942. As we continued political action, our polities have

grown differently from the power politics in vogue. The difference is partly due to the atheist outlook and partly to our acquaintance with the Gandhian method.

The principal feature of power politics is the capture of the authority of the government by fair or by foul means. The desire to capture power raises competition for power among those who have the desire. Competition leads to formation of political parties and rivalries among the parties make the means of capturing power more foul than fair. Party machinations and corruptive ways and the many evils to which present democracies are subject flow from power-politics.

The real purpose of politics is to solve people's problems by means of governmental legislation. Constructive programme is the non-political method of solving people's problems. Sarvodaya is non-political in that sense. But in the modren age when problems are complex and social relations are wide, constructive work is not able to cope up with the demands of people's needs. Therefore, we require politics that is legislation, to solve our problems. But we find politics also failing to solve the problems satisfactorily on account of the competition for power entering into politics. Therefore, unless politics

are cleared of the mania for power, politics cannot fulfil its real purpose of solving people's problems. That is, those who hold the reins of governmental authority should be people-minded and not power-minded. But to suppose that lust for power is inherent in the very institutions of a government on account of its centralised authority and revenues, and to recommend non-political methods for solution of people's problems, especially when non-political methods are too inadequate to deal with the problems of the present stage of civilizational progress, are born of a feeling of frustration. Therefore, to be practical a way must be found to turn power-politics into real politics, that would make persons in authority people-minded instead of power-minded.

Gandhi proposed the method of decentralization of the basic units of administration so that the people get into direct touch with their representatives. The direct touch enables people to control their representatives in authority and to check their slipping into greed for power, because people stand to lose by such a wrong. Even in self defence against the evil of power mania, people should prevent legislators from abuse of power. But effective check is possible only when units of administration are sufficiently decentralized to keep legislators in close touch with people.

If Gandhi got into the seat of power on India winning freedom, or if Jawaharlal Nehru followed the Gandhian way, India would have had politics instead power politics. Both did not happen. Gandhi was assassinated and Nehru held the power that preserved the imperialist ways of centralized authoriiy. India has been politically free since 1947, but is in the grip of power politics rather than in the dawn of real politics.

What programme shall we, the atheists, take up to clear the present politics of power mania? Decentralization is indeed desiarable. But it is not a feasible proposition for us as individual citizens in a democracy. It can be done only after we get into seats of power. Even Vinoba with all his prestige, mighty effort of foot march throughout India, and huge following, could not get administration decentralized effectively, though that was his avowed purpose. Some of us were with him in the Sarvodaya movement, as it was known. I wrote a book *Why Gram-Raj* by name printed by the Sarvodaya publications. Its theme is the need of decentralization of the basic units of adminstration.

To start the work from where we are, we took to the programmes of partylessness and

pomplessness of legislators. The progress of atheist political action consisted in formulation and practice of items of partylessness and pomplessness. Nevertheless, we keep close to costructive work also.

In 1946, I was invited to the camp of Kasturiba Memorial Trust at Borivilli, Bombay. Mridula Sarabhai was the secretary of the Trust. She was quite rational. She asked me to speak on superstitions. Naturally, I referred to the need of atheism to fight superstitions. There was a protest against the mention of atheism in a camp which was run under the aegis of Gandhism. Also Mridula dropped the item of prayer from the time-table of the camp. The protest was carried to Gandhi. He did not take a serious notice of it. He suggested that prayer might be arranged for those who need it. Gandhians were more 'godly' than Gandhi.

Next year Mridula Sarabhai became a Secretary of the All India Congress Committee along with Kheskar. Sadiq Ali was the Office Secretary. I was taken in as the Orgaaiser, first at Allahabad, and then at Delhi Camp office. Gandhi was staying in the Bhangi Colony on Panchkuan Road among sweepers. I was going there pretty frequently. I noticed the difference between the slum dwellings of sweepers where Gandhi lived

and the posh mansions of the cabinet ministers who held the posts in the care-taker government under the prime ministership of Jawaharlal Nehru in the name of Gandhi. Obviously the principles of Gandhism and its austerity began to be side-tracked.

Saraswati was with me for some time. We were invited to lunch by Mohammad Rahamtullah Khan, the president of the Delhi Congress Committe. He was very elderly and considerate. According to his custom, he served beef as a dish at the meal. Saraswati and I are vegetarians by the caste habit which we acquired in childhood. When we discarded caste and religious association, we revised food habits also that are linked up with caste distinctions. But normally we remained vegetarian. At that time we ate a bit of beef to show that we are not sentimentally vegetarian hidebound by caste habits and religious feelings. We asked Md. Rahamtullah Khan whether he would eat pork. Pork is a religious taboo to Muslims as beef is to Hindu castes. Rahamtulla Khan saw the point in our question. He rose above the levels of religious difference and told us with dignity, "Yes, I should, when it is served to me." Of course we did not have a dish of pork ready at hand. But his reply left an impression on us and suggested an objective

programme for effacing Hindu-Muslim differences. Twentyfive years later we conducted the programme of beef and pork eating in the face of opposition from conventional religionists. The incident at Md. Rahamtulla Khan's house formed the basis for an organised and extensive programme in 1972.

CHAPTER – XII

BETWEEN GANDHI AND MARX

Nehru was not faithful to Gandhi as Lenin was to Marx. Nehru had immense love and respect for Gandhi. That was sentimental. He did not consider the Gandhian discipline of austerity feasible or desirable in independent India. As Prime Minister of the care-taker government till the August 15, 1947, Nehru was visiting Gandhi who was residing in the slum of the sweepers. But he was himself living in ministerial mansions of the British imperial regime. He paid little heed to Gandhi's advice to Governors, ministers and legislators to deem themselves as servants of people and to live a way of life close to the common man of India who is poverty-stricken. Gandhi did not simply say this but lived that way of life in a hut at Sevagram Ashram and in the slums at Delhi. Neither Nehru nor "Gandhians" appreciated the need of austerity to deserve the respect of the mass of people for the laws they make.

In contrast to Nehru, stood Lenin. On becoming the Secretary of the Communist party he refused the increase in his salary. Noteworthy still was his conduct, when he shifted to Gorky Hill to take rest. There was the mansion of the

commander-in-chief of the Czar who had fled after the revolution. Lenin stayed not in the mansion, but in the servent's quarter. My admiration for him grew a thousand fold when I saw the servants quarter by the side of the big mansion when I visited Moscow in 1974. At once in my mind's eye Gandhi's hut in Sevagram appeared side by side with the servant's quarter where Lenin lived. Both stood in terrible contrast with the Teen Murthi Bhavan in which Nehru lived, the palatial mansion of the commander-in-chief of the British army in India. Lenin lived in the servant's quarter of the mansion; Nehru lived in the mansion itself. The difference indicated the difference in their faithfulness to the ideology they professed.

Inspired by Lenin's simplicity, the rank and file of the Communist party all over the world lived close to the common people. Following Nehru, Gandhians deviated from the Gandhian principles.

After the Quit India movement, my close colleague, Tummala Challayya, was disillusioned with Gandhian ideology which could not inspire Gandhians with simplicity. He was twice in prison in Quit India movement, and an ardent Gandhian at first. Later, he moved towards the Communist Party, and persuaded some others

too to join the Party. He and Yellamanchili Ramakrishnayya followed the path of communism, went under ground and Ramakrishnayya was shot dead in an encounter with police. Chellayya narrowly escaped capital punishment.

Chellayya persuaded me at that time to join the Communist Party. The marked difference between the simplicity of Communist workers and the pompous ostentation of Congressmen was his irrefutable argument. I looked at Gandhism and Marxism in their wider perspective, of theoretical implications and practical programmes. Principles of dialectrical materialism and their application to human history basically deny freewill to the individual. This goes against the atheist assertion of the freewill. In practice, the Marxian ideology would necessitate secrecy and undrground life in the attempt to organise for the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat or of its chamption, the Communist Party. I am averse to secrecy. While I disapproved the pomp of congressmen. I could not accept the implications of Marxism. I felt that both Gandhism and Marxism had good parts and both of them needed atheist correction for clearing them of faults. I explained this in my book "Positive Atheism." We carried on the atheist work on political and

constructive fronts, without getting into the streams of the Congress or of the Communist Party.

Gandhi was assassinated on the January 30, 1948. He had to lay down his life because his followers would not listen to him. His solution to the Hindu Muslim problem was to give Jinnah, the Muslim leader, a blank cheque to form the government of undivided India. He said that it was firstly wrong to think in terms of Hindu citizens and Muslim citizens, instead of thinking in terms of Indian secular citizenship ; and that secondly, even if religious distinctions were granted, Hindus were in two thirds majority in numbers and could easily be liberal to their Muslim brothern, though they were found to be stubborn. Love of power blinded reason. The Congress High Command agreed to the division to avoid the colossal blood-bath. India was divided on August 15, 1947. Gandhi's protest took the non-violent from of working for communal harmony. His voice was drowned in communal frenzy and a Hindu shot down a "Sanatana Hindu", who was simply a human.

After Gandhi's assassination, I severed connection with the Congress and proceeded along the atheist path in all aspects of life, as I conceived them.

We shifted from Mudunur to Patamata as the latter is on the road-side with better communications being a suburb of Vijayawada town. On the day we left Mudunur, there was a farewell function. A purse of collections was presented to us and friends helped us to shift the huts from Mudunur to Patamata. The seven years' stay at Mudunur and the reminiscences of activities there have fostered bonds of lasting relationship. Paturi Nagabhushanam, the Secretary of the Library movement, secured for us a plot of land at Patamata to put up our sheds. We called that place also atheist centre and conducted adult education classes in the untouchable slum by our side. The landlord, Govindarajulu Venkateswara Rao, and his brothers, though congressmen, objected to our association with untouchables since it would disturb the peasant-labour relations in the area. But we continued our programmes. They obtained an ex-parte legal decree for our eviction. Chennupati Ramakotaiah, the head of the village, sympathized with the clash of my ways with the existing social set-up and invited me to his land in another part of Patamata. The present Atheist Centre, has been there since 1948.

Better communications at Patamata facilitated widening of engagements. I participated in several library and adult education conferences

organised by Paturi Nagabhushanam who had devoted his life to library movement. He took part in the freedom struggle of 1930 32 and is an enthusiastic Gandhite. He appreciated my condition that wherever I go for a conference, my lodge and food should be arranged in the untouchable slum. A notable incident happened at the Alampur conference. The local organizers who generally treated untouchables as manual labourers and disliked close association with them, did not make the arrangements satisfactorily as promised. At a late hour, Nagabhushanam personally attended to the matter and several delegates to the conference came to the slum and shared the meal they arranged. It was a unique event in those parts and it served to awaken new social consciousness. The most distinguished guest of the function was Gadicherla Hari Sarvothama Rao, another freedom fighter of radical views. He walked to the slum for participation in the meal, in spite of his advanced age.

Similar incidents happened at a village in Cuddapah District and at Vallabhapuram in Guntur District. Each incident gained fresh friends to us who came forward with sacrifice of caste privileges and worked for equal social respect.

The conference put me in touch with Ayyanki Venkata Ramanaiah, Venkata Rama Naidu, Putumbaka Sreeramulu, Roche Victoria, Korukonda Subbaraju and several elite of Andhra Pradesh.

Atheism extended its frontiers through programmes of action.

CHAPTER - XIII

ECONOMIC EQUALITY

Economic problem is the most important one in human affairs. There are cases when men and women stake their life for honour and liberty. Wars and suicides have no place in human life unless there are values considered more worthy than food and comfort. Yet, in day-to-day life food is very important. Those for whom food is assured progress in fields of art and technology is more rapid than those who have to search for or fight for food. The backwardness of Asian and African countries is primarily due to their lack of social security.

Further, modern age recognises the equality of all humans. Therefore, to have social security evenly distributed among all people yields better results in development of human affairs than when its availability differs with advantages in competition. Evidently, socialist countries enjoy greater peace and progress than countries under capitalist economy, though both have social security. Hence economic equality is the cry of the day.

Countries that have adopted the Marxian ideology have a materialist awakening and they

have definitely achieved economic equality now. But their achievement is subject to political dictatorship, which curbs individual freedom. The problem before atheists is to find out a method by which economic equality is achieved while preserving the freedom of the individual. That is, taking democracy and socialism together.

Because no country has so far achieved socialism democratically, the common belief is that Marxism alone stands for socialism, while democracy supports capitalism. But we find Gandhi attempted at achieving socialism democratically. The thirteenth item of his Constructive Programme is to work for Economic Equality. Of course, the method proposed for achieving economic equality is trusteeship. And Trusteeship is too good to be real. The Sarvodaya movement which gave trusteeship the best trial has failed in the final achievement. Therefore, while Marxism is well known by its achievement of socialism, the thirteenth item of Gandhian programme is either little known by the lack of achievement or where it is known it is discredited by its trusteeship principal which is both non political and utopian. Nevertheless, the indication of possibility of achieving socialism democratically is found in the thirteenth item of

the Constructive Programme of Gandhi. It is this possibility that attracts atheists. They feel that if democratic political method is adopted instead of trusteeship, it is possible to achieve economic equality without disturbing the freedom of the individual. The correction needed in this context it to drive democracy towards legislations in favour of economic equality and atheists feel that democracy can be driven in that direction when it is rendered partyless and pompless.

With this plan, atheists held the Conference of Gandhi Sangh at Gudivada at first. The name of Gandhi was taken in order to emphasize that not only Marx but Gandhi also talked of economic equality. The conference highlited the thirteenth item of the Constructive Programme. The organisers of the conference were Mudedla Ramarao and K. Bhujanga Bhushana Rao who were freedom fighters. S. Ramanathan, President of the All India Rationalist Association, and S. Jagannathan were among the guests from Madras who contributed to the discussion. Kodati Narayan Rao from Hyderabad helped us give shape to the resolution. The success of the conference was due to the cooperative effort of several persons who were interested in evolving a democratic method for achieving economic equality.

The same work is carried on later when we formed Arthik Samatha Mandal (Association for the achievement of economic equlity) at Wardha under the presidentship of J. C. Kumarappa. I was the secretary. D. J. Hathekar, T. K. Bang, Suresh Ram and Vasant Nargolkar were on the committee. We resolved that democracy should be rid of party and pomp in order to think in terms of achieving economic equality.

For spreading atheist ideas and programmes of work, we wanted to start a journal. A small printing press with a treadle came in handy. Lavanam underwent training in press work at Madras with Shramajeevi Acharya. At Patamata we started the press. My children Vijayam, Samaram, Mythri, Vidya and several coworkers from Patamata village worked in the press. I edited the Telugu weekly, *Sangham*, (Society) in whose columns we discussed the atheist ideology and plan of action. The press was bought out of public donation and the journal was run on public sympathy. After running it for five years, we changed the name to Arthik Samata (Economic Equality), under the editorship of Lavanam. The change of name was in tune with our emphasis on economic problems. When our press became too rickety to print, C. Rangappa of Proddatur printed our journal in his Sarathy

Press. He printed some books of atheism too and helped our work.

Besides the two journals in Telugu, *Sangham* and *Arthik Samata,* we ran a Hindi monthly, *Insaan* (means a human being) for a few years, to gain contact with the Hindi States of the North. Now we have the English monthly journal, *The Atheist,* which has world wide circulation in atheist circles. For a year Lavanam was at Kakinada with C. V. K. Rao, assisting the editing of *Sarathi* which adopted the ideology of economic equlity.

Though we were busy with press, journal and spread of atheist thought, we did not lose sight of constructive work. Being adjacent to the town, the constructive work at Patamata was different from the work at Mudunur. While unemployment and poverty are general problems concentrated in urban areas in developing countries with no social security, the specific problem with which we were confronted was the eviction of hut-dwellers who are untouchables, from the place they were living on. The reason for the eviction was either the needs of town planning or the ownership of the land by a richman. Such a question came to us where 48 huts were involved. I approached the municipal authorities and the state government to provide the evicted

persons with alternative house sites for the huts. They pleaded lack of provision in the budget for the help. My wife and I took a straight course. We helped the evicted hutsmen to occupy a wide and unused road margin. The municipal authorities objected to the occupation as it was illegal. Our simple answer was that the occupation was moral. Where there is discord between legality and morality, legality should be opposed and morality should be upheld. Law is for man. If a law hurts man's life, law must be changed and man shoud be allowed to live. The straight and open vindication of our stand, let the poor people live on there. The stand we took involved the affected people in the contention and they now stand on their legs with confidence. They feel strong because they are in the right.

My children have grown with the humanist outlook. Their marital alliances disregarded caste distinctions. The daughter of Nara, an atheist married a muslim on principle. My son Lavanam, married an "untouchable" and this was the second marriage that was performed at Sevagram on atheist principles with no mention of god The first was the marriage of my daughter Manorama with Arjunarao.

As the children grew up and were qualified educationally by private study or by regular

collegiate education, we had to find work for them. They did not want salried jobs. So my second daughter Mythri and Hemalata Lavanam started a private children school at the atheist centre, Patamata. It was named Vasavya school. Vasavya is a word coined with the first letters of three words in Telugu, *Vastavikata* (sense of reality), *Sanghadrusti* (sociability), and *Vyaktitvam* (individuality) – the three qualities that atheism cherishes. The children of Vasavya school were required to drop caste appellations of their names. The school enlisted the cooperation of the parents of students and educated the homes indirectly. It was an enjoyable experience.

CHAPTER - XIV

DIRECT ACTION

The feeling of freedom is the principal feature of atheism. It makes atheists masters of every situation. Being masters they cannot complain. With a sense of responsibility, and direct action, they have to redress whatever they find unjust.

Direct action is the same as Gandhi's Satyagraha. When Gandhi said that living faith in god was necessary for a Satyagrahi, he spoke in common conventional language. In spirit and practice, Satyagraha and atheistic direct action are alike inasmauch as both should insist upon the right and oppose the wrong

Direct action has two advantages. It sets right a wrong. Also it disciplines the activist. Our action against ornamental flower plants illustrated the double advantage. We felt that as long as there is scaricity of food any where, it is anti social to use land, water, manure, time interest or energy for growing non edibles. From the point of view of social responsibility the colour of tomato or the shape of cabbage is more pleasing to the eyes then nonedible

salvia or pansy. So, after due notice to the concerned authorities, some of us planned in 1968 to replace ornamental plants with edibles in the public garden at Hyderabad. T. Ramarao who is not avowedly an atheist, liked the plan. Before he participated in the operation, he pulled out chrysathemums from the pots of his garden and put in coriander there. By practice and sacrifice he inspried others to do likewise. It spoke of the honesty of his purpose and added dignity to our work, with the result that several passers by on the road joined us sympathetically in replacing flower plants with edibles, in the garden that evening. The police imprisioned us on the charge of destroying public garden. But the moral value of our programmes was so forceful that on rethinking, the government had to withdraw the case against us unconditionally after a month.

Our direct action was largely against the pompous extravagance of the heads of the State. Political power is a potent factor in regulating lives of the people. On winning political freedom of India, we expected the persons wielding political power to think and work for the welfare of all people. But those who were elected to seats of power, misused authority for selfish gains and used the revenues of the government more for personal comforts and pride of pomp than for

people's welfare. So, we directed our action against the pompous extravagances of heads of the State.

Elected legislators could abuse power since people were not vigilant enough to check the excesses of their representatives. Accustomed to feel subservient to their notion of god, common people obeyed their governments too, instead of controlling them and preventing lapses. Atheists re-educate the people to tell them that they are the masters of their government, as democracy requires them to be. Involvement in the programms of direct action is the best method of education.

Heads of State do need special fecilities for the performance of their special functions. But personal pomp is certainly an abuse of authority and disdain of people. They travel in first class and live in luxurious mansions, while common people are packed in third class compartments and are restricted to huts in slums. At one time, we insisted on the ministers of the state too travelling in third class in sympathy with the condition of common people whom they profess to serve. At the railway station, we prevented them from getting into first class compartments. Chundi Veeraswamy, who earns out his livelihood as a barber, was a great activist in the pro-

gramme. He could see the injustice in comparison with his hard labour everyday. We were often kept out by the police till the train left. However, P. V. G. Raju, and T. Viswanatham when they were ministers travelled in third class sometimes in sympathy with our demand. M. V. Krishna Rao, another minister travels in omnibus along with common people, a big change in the prevailing customs in India. Tanguturi Prakasam, an elderly gentleman, too travelled in third class on principle when he was the state minister for revenue.

One minister's reaction was strange. When I persuaded him to travel in third class, his ministerial dignity, false as it was, was hurt. He slighted me with "Who are you?" Straight I replied, "I am your master." The right of democracy struck him hard. He withdrew behind the cordon of police.

Rajendra Prasad was a close associate of Gandhi. He became the first President of the Republic of India. In a special interview, I requested him, "The best place for the President of India is the slum were Gandhi lived. I won't press that demand now. Please visit the slum wherever you go. Slum-dwellers also are citizens of India. Placed as you are, they cannot easily approach you." He was too honest to deny my

request. He could not agree either, on account of the form and pomp that surrounded him, and parried the question.

I repeated the request with Chandulal Trivedi, when he was the Governor of Andhra State. He could receive addresses from clubs and corporations, but he should visit the slums also. Twice we staged black flag demonstrations when he paid no heed. Popular sympathy grew in our favour. Third time he yielded. He visited slums wherever he went thereafter and attended to their needs. My wife, Saraswati, and Andraiah played notable roles in those direct actions.

We pressed upon Sanjiva Reddy and Brahmanda Reddy, when they were Chief Ministers of Andhra Pradesh to shift from their palatial mansions to more modest abodes, closer to the common people. I had a long discussion with Kamaraj Nadar on the point when he was the Prisident of the Congress Party. In 1961-62 14 of us, including Saraswati and Lavanam, started on a foot march from Sevagram Ashram to Delhi. It was 1,100 miles long and took 99 days. It was a protest march against the pompous extravagance and party affiliation of the Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. At every camp on the march and on the way too, we were

meeting people, addressing meetings and explaining that, in demorcacy people are masters and ministers are servents. By the time we reached Delhi, we were 38 from different States of India. We wrote repeatedly to the Prime Minister, the first representative of the people. We requested him to set an example to the people as the "heir of Gandhi". He was silent. At Delhi we blocked the entrance of his official residence, Teen Murthi, as direct protest. He called us for talk the next day. Mahavir Bhai and I met him. He said he would gladly respond to the demand, if the public is sufficiently awakend to the principles of partylessness and pomplessness. We said that a gesture from him would rouse the people to democratic consciousness. At present democratic practices move in a vicious circle shifting responsibilities of change from government to people and people to government.

I found the members of Communist Party no better in their response. Their members in legislatures draw the same salaries and allowances as those whom they call bourgeoisie. They say that circumstances should change for persons to change. How do circumstances change? Certainly by the effort of some individuals. Lenin did not wait for the whole bourgeoisie to lose the

class character before he lived in the servant's quarter in Gorki Hill.

Nevertheless, four legislators of the Andhra Legislature effected a voluntary cut in their salaries and allowances to be honest to their representation of people's interests. They were C.V.K. Rao, Vavilala Gopalakrishnayya, M. V. Subbareddi and Kcarapati Pattabhi Ramaiah.

Another aspect of direct action is seeking elections.

CHAPTER-XV

SEEKING ELECTION

One-adult-one-vote is the outstanding character of democracy. The equality of voting franchise ought to lead to equality of economic opportunity and equality of social respect among people through appropriate legislation. But democracies have not so far succeeded in establishing equality, despite the equality of voting franchise. What is the reason? Atheists have thought over the problem with an open mind. They have tried to find out where and how democracy is sabotaged in the fair purpose of achieving equality.

One of the reasons for failure of democracy is the centralisation of administration which removes the representative away from the easy control of people. Then the representative can abuse the powers of his position and fall into the temptation of personal comfort. The programmes of direct action have been attempts to control the legislators and to compel them to shed pomp as far as possible under the conditions of centralized administration.

The second method is seeking election by those who are inspired with the desire to establish equality democratically. If they get elected,

they can try to introduce legislation to cut down pomp and to decentralise administration. But there is a hurdle in the way of seeking election. Political parties have crept into the democratic machinery and have virtually captured the election platforms. Parties set up their candidates, and scare away non-party candidates from seeking election. Nor are the party candidates useful for the purpose of democracy. The competition among political parties for getting elected by hook or by crook, fouls the election machinery. They collect huge funds, bribe and corrupt voters, bug and blackmail opponents. After election their attention is more absorbed in strengthening their positions by pulling the legs of opponents than working for the welfare of the people. The way of democracy that is side-tracked by political parties is called power politics in contrast with the people's politics of real democracy. Atheists are confronted with this ugly conditions of power-politics when they seek election.

Atheists know that there is no mention at all of parties in democratic constitutions. Even if there is any provision it could be amended, in view of the harm that political parties do to people's interests. In the face of the conventions of power politics atheists feel bold to seek election as non-party candidates.

I sought election to Parliament in the first general election in India in 1952. Reve stood for the State Assembly from Suryapet Constituency. Though people were habituated to power-politics and they were in the grips of political parties, I found it easy to put across the purpose of democracy to the people. I held street corner meetings, contacted the people straight and held open dialogues. I did not succeed at the polls, but certainly I succeeded in opening a new path to lead towards people's politics out of power politics. It was a partyless movement.

M. N. Roy also propounded the theory of partyless democracy earlier. Consistently he dissolved his party and encouraged the members to lead the partyless movement. A. G. K. Murty of Tenali was a protagonist of the cause. He gave his full support to me. Later when I sought election to the State Assembly again in 1967, his colleague M.V. Ramamurthy stood for the Parliament election. In 1972 elections the number of candidates to seek election from partyless platform increased. B. Venugopal from Repalle, Parachuri Venkataratnam from Kuchinapudi, K. Muralidhararao from Nallagonda, S. Narasimhulu from Cuddapah and Lavanam from Vijayawada were among the candidates.

With the help of Mahadev Singh, S. R. L. Devi and Vandemataram Ramachandrarao, we held a conference of Partyless Democracy at Hyderabad in 1960. Jayaprakash Narayan inaugurated the conference. Some principles were highlighted at the conference. We said that candidates from partyless platform should considerably cut down election expenses, because they were the main source of corruption. Those who spend money at the election will be tempted to recover the money by illicit means after the election. Secondly, the opposition should be free and fluid, instead of being bloc and whip bound. Opposition is effective only when it is free. It can then be constructive too depending on the merits of the issue instead of opposing for the sake of opposition which is unworthy of the dignity of a legislator. When opposition is free, the cabinet of ministers accepts the decision of the House by a majority of free votes, eventhough it may mean amendment or rejection of a cabinet proposal. In such a state of partylessness the leader of the House is elected by the whole House by the method of eliminating those who get the least number of votes each time and repeating election.

It is the power politics where parties vie with one another that call elections a "contest" meaning a kind of rivalry between the different

candidates. In the partyless approach, we seek election but contest with none.

We held a series of talks, seminars and study classes in towns and rural parts on partyless democracy. I toured the country extensively in the month of April, May and June 1962 addressing meetings on partyless and pompless democracy. A week long worker's camp was held at Ghaziabad, near Delhi in early 1962. Conferences on Partyless Democracy were organised successfully in August 1961 at Hubli; in June 1962 at Calcutta; in October 1968 at Bangalore and in February 1975 at Warangal. The discussions on partyless democracy clarified two features as principal changes from power politics. First, seeking election is as much a right of the citizen in democracy as casting vote. Party politics set up party candidates at elections and practically shut out others from the privilege. Partyless platform breaks the self arrogated monopoly of political parties and encourages any number of candidates to seek election in a constituency. Out of the several candidates, voters choose those who commend themselves by their history of service, integrity of conduct and ability to represent people. The wide scope cuts across caste and communal bias and presents alternatives to the yes-men of parties. Not the promise of a showy manifesto but the objective to legislate

for establishing economic equality and social justice becomes prominent. Secondly, an elected member will serve his full term. The mischief of power politics which asks a member of the rival party to resign every time will be replaced by the healthy convention of checking the lapses of a legislator by pressures of direct action. The extra-expenditure of by-elections will be avoided and the funds will be usefully diverted to promote people's welfare. The party politics which reduce a citizen's rights only to casting votes periodically will be activated by the principle that the right of a citizen in democracy is also to see that his representatives do their duty. Democracy strengthens through people's participation. Decentralization of the units of administration certainly facilitates people's participation. But partylessness is the first state from power-politics to decentralization.

Besides Radical Humanists of Royist ideology and Jayaprakash Narayan, members of Sarvodaya are committed to the principle of partylessness. So, I joined Sarvodaya a year after it started in 1951. I spoke freely about partyless programmes from Sarvodaya platforms. We held the conference of Partyless Democracy at Raipur. Vishnu Sran, Tiwary and several friends helped its spread, with the name of Satyagraha Samaj.

But Sarvodaya largely is non political in its activities. Therefore, though it agreed to partyless democracy in principle, it discouraged active programmes in that direction. The conference on partyless democracy at Raipur, the Sevagram-Delhi March in 1961 were opposed by Sarvodaya office bearers as being political, though members like Thakurdas Bang, Ganesh Prasad Naik, Mahavir Bhai, Lokendra Bhai and Hemdev Sharma actively supported and participated in programmes of partyless democracy.

Shri Shivamurty Swamy, member of Parliament from Raichur, Karnataka, is an ardent supporter of Partyless Democracy. He introduced a non-official bill in Parliament laying it down that the Prime Minister should be elected by the whole House, giving up the convention of appointing the leader of the majority party as the prime minister. Sivamurty Swamy held a conference at Hubli to which Mahavir Bhai, S. R. Subrahmaniam, Lavanam and I were invited.

Partyless democracy which emerged as the political programme of atheism by and large gathered wide support.

CHAPTER – XVI

ARE THEY OUTRAGEOUS?

Atheist mind is open. Everytime it practically writes on a clean slate. All revolutions do it. Atheism is revolutionary. Atheists respect old values in so far as they are useful to present times. Atheists do not hesitate to drop such old values that do not bear the march of progress. The only two values that abide with atheists are the objective of equality of all humans and the method of openness. Equality and openness are indispensable social needs. Put to the test of equality and oppenness, we find most of our old values require revision or even rejection. Thinking and working along these lines, I was confronted with special situations, whose solution from the atheist standards seemed ordinary to me, while they looked outrageous to others till they understood me.

The first one related to the social status of un-married mothers. In India girls are married early. Till 1935 when Child-marriage Restraint Act was passed, marriages were mostly pre-puberty. Therefore, motherhood is shielded by the condition of marriage and unwed motherhood does not arise except in the case of widows who are not remarried. So by old social custom

unwed motherhood is regarded a heinous crime on the part of the woman. Unwed mothers either resort to abortion stealthily, or commit suicide.

The first case of an unwed mother we came across was at Mudunur, sometime in 1946. She was a Brahmin widow. Her head was shaven, as it is the custom with widows of some castes, including Brahmins. She belonged to an adjacent village. She was about 25 years of age. When her pregnancy came to be evident, she was discarded by the village and the helpless woman stayed alone on the tank bund at a distance. When the case came to our notice, my wife and I called her to the Atheist Centre at Mudunur and offered her all assistance of food, shelter, maternity home and post-natal care. As friends of Mudunur were atheistcally minded, they agreed with me and came forward with material help.

The woman was happy at first at our offer. But when she found out that at the atheist centre we live without caste distinctions, she being a brahmin, refused food at our hands, and left us. She delivered in a hospital. The experience made us aware both of the condition of unwed mothers and of the sentiment of caste.

I wrote news articles on the social injustice to unwed mothers. For the same act, man is

left free as he can escape. while woman is punished. Should special hardship be imposed on women on account of the difference in sex? It is as unfair as the discrimination due to colour of the skin in racial differences.

Later, I found Radha Kishan Home at Hyderabad, run by Mr. and Mrs. Dage, gave shelter to unwed mothers, but they strictly kept their identity secret. Such treatment affords relief in individual cases, but does not solve the problem socially. I was enthused when I found that the Constitution of USSR, and that of People's China give to unwed mothers the same status as other mothers.

In 1970 and again in 1974, when I visited USA and Europe, I was glad to find that there were institutions to take care of unwed mothers. As the institution of family itself is cracking in Europe and USA and as marital alliance is going out of fashion, the way of becoming a mother does not matter much there. Yet, the old custom of disrespecting unwed mother has not yet been delibrately set aside, though the sting is lost.

In 1951 my second daughter, Mythri, became an unwed mother. As the boy was married, the question of her marriage with the boy did not

arise. As atheists, Saraswati and I wanted to face the problem openly. Dr. Achamamba came out with her full support to us. She offered to delivery, pre and post-natal care. As I was wholly depending on public subscription for our food and work, I needed support in this open solution of a problem which was shrouded in secrecy so long. I made known the fact to some of my friends by words of mouth and by written letter. Some friends thought that my frankness was foolhardy. A friend went to the extent of addressing some common friends condemning the condition of my daughter and deprecating the atheist way of life, in view of this incident.

But openness paid me well. While a few old friends dropped out, many more new friends came in support. Gandhi was no more by that time. But Kishorelal Mushruwala, who wrote the introduction to my book, *An Atheist With Gandhi,* appreciated my stand.

Mythri was delivered of a daughter. She married Jonnalagadda Ramalingayya and has three more children. She acquired academic qualifications and plans to start a home for women where problems can be solved openly raising the dignity of women to be equal to men. Sex should not make a diference in social status as racial traits ought not to.

The second event that raised a furore of protest was openly eating Beef and Pork. Among Christians no meat is a taboo. But pork-eating is forbidden for Muslims and beef is for Hindus religiously. To disown religious sentiments into which many people are born, we thought everyone ought to eat tiny bits of beef and pork together openly. Saraswati and I and our children are normally vegetarians. As diet habits are associated with caste and religious distinctions in India, we have no objection to eat a bit of any meat openly. At Delhi, Saraswati and I had eaten beef with Rahamtulla Khan as mentioned before. Our atheist friends liked the programme and so we proposed the function of eating tiny bits of beef and pork openly with bread or rice from 4 to 5 p. m. on Indian Independence Day, August 15, 1972 at Atheist Centre, Patamata. There were no special invitations, but anybody was welcome to witness or to participate in the function.

The announcement of the function looked outrageous to Hindu and Muslim beliefs. But beef and pork eating clears the mind of religious bias and breeds human outlook. Without understanding the objective of the function, Sankaracharya of Puri, a high priest of Hindus, who was then camping at Hyderabad, issued a statement

protesting against the function. I replied that I was not a Hindu but a human, and so his protest was misdirected. I invited him to the function, if he liked to transcend a denominational belief and grow human. Sankaracharya, with vested interests in Hindu sectarianism, rallied a protest with hundreds of religious people. It became a law and order problem. Police force was called into action. Amidst wide protest, 136 marched in a queue, noted down their names and addresses and participated in the function of Beef and Pork eating that day according to the schedule.

To us beef and pork eating looked a simple social obligation that sheds sectarian associations, but to others it looked an outrage against religious practices.

The function was repeated by the Atheist Association at Visakhapatnam and at Vellore by Senthamizhko. At Coimbatore R. Kasturi arranged a beef and pork lunch on a wide scale to more than 800 guests. Periayar E. V. Ramaswami participated in the function which was inaugurated by Saraswati. E.V.R. was a fighter all through his public life against religious belief and caste distinctions. His presence at that ripe old age of 95, lent special significance to the function at Coimbatore.

Abraham who organised the function at Madras limited the number of guests to 13 to break the Christian superstition in that number. C. S. Murthy, K. Rangasai and Janardhanam and Paul were among the participants that day.

At Suryapet Kana organised the function in the face of Hindu protest and at Gudivada too the function was well attended by men and women. Manorama, the widow of Sobhanarao, my early atheist associate and Sanskrit scholor, took particular care to participate in the function. The details of the several functions were published in the columns of *The Atheist*.

The incidents with unmarried mothers and with beef and pork eating were events of special significance for the Atheist movement, as they shook religious faith and custom at the roots. No wonder, they attracted attention. From the atheist point of view they are ordinary disciplines of social conduct, but from the point of view of old values of custom and faith, they looked outrageous. In course of time, the objectives will be understood and the prejudices will wear off.

CHAPTER - XVII

SPREAD OF ATHEISM

Atheism is not new. For a long time it was used as a term of abuse. Nevertheless, every prophet was persecuted by his contemporaries for blasphemy, apostasy or heresy, if not altogether for atheism. Obviously, atheism contains the element of progress and basic change. Therefore, in the last century Charles Bradlaugh of England projected the idea of atheism more openly and Robert Ingersoll of U. S. A. called himself an agnostic but spread atheistic ideas through speechs and writings. In India, Periyar E.V. Ramaswami and his followers called themseves atheists, though they did not use the words as such on platforms. They preferred to negotiate in the name of Rationalism. In fact, many people with atheistic leanings use the terms rationalism, humanism, or free thought instead. Our speciality consisted in using the term atheism openly and in giving it a positive content and in evolving social and economic and specially political programmes of action for atheism.

Since 1949, our periodicals, *Sangham, Arthik Samata* in Telugu, *Insaan* in Hindi and *The Atheist* in English have served to spread and

explain the ideology and programmes of atheistic thought and action. So several friends and sympathisers, directly or indirectly, adopted atheist ways. Kana at Suryapet and Nara at Nuzvid and Venugopal at Repalle started atheist centres, and took up the programmes of the atheist centre at Patamata, including its political aspect. But others adopted the social and cultural programmes and some called themselves non-political.

The Atheist Society of India which Jayagopal, the editor of the English Journal, *The Age of Atheism*, started independently at Visakhapatnam conducted the Beef and Pork function, and burned religious scriptures openly. He takes a variety of bold programmes with rationalist thought but they call their centre non-political.

Similarly, J. Veeraswamy and a band of workers at Hyderabad in particular, and all over Andhra Pradesh in general, take up the programme of eradicating caste-differences. They actively encourage intercaste marriages and help change of names from conventional religious and caste association to nonconformist forms. Kana and Nara are examples of non-conformism. A legislator with the name M. V. Subbareddi, reddi being the application of a caste, changed his name to Gamago. Yet the Caste Eradication

Association calls itself non-political, and turns out excellent work in its own sphere.

Vidya and Seshagirirao who are members of the Congress party, consistantly discard flower garlands and use fruits for reception in sympathy with the direct action programme of replacing ornamental flower plants with edibles. M. V. Krishnarao, a minister of Andhra Pradesh also rejects flower garlands and receives only fruits instead.

Vinoba Bhave, who started the Bhoodan movement and gave shape and substance to the Sarvodaya movement, toured Andhra Pradesh in 1955. My son, Lavanam, interpreted his Hindi speeches sentence by sentence into Telugu throughout the seven months of the tour. I was one of the organisers of the tour programme. Vinoba regularly conducts prayers both in the morning and in the evening. He continued the practice at the meetings in the tour also. But in deference to the atheist ideology of Lavanam and myself, Vinoba kindly substituted the regular verses of prayer with five minutes of silence. He said that during those five minutes the audience, according to their wish, could severally meditate on god or think of social values of life like truthfulness, compassion and love. It was an accommodation of atheists in a common audience with

respect to each others views. It was an act of recognition of the atheistic ideology. Vinoba visited the Atheist Centre at Patamata, when he visited Vijayawada during the tour in 1955.

Esteem for any ideology comes in the long run, not by its theoretical perfections but by the lovable conduct of its votaries. It is more so in the case of atheism, which has been a term of contempt so long. The contempt is the result of the propaganda of interests vested in exploitation of weaker sections. Yet, bias against it is a fact which atheists cannot ignore to take notice of. Gandhi warned me against this handicap and advised me to take another name in place of atheism. But when we chose to take the label of atheism, it is incumbent on atheists to be doubly wary of their own conduct. A notable achievement in this direction goes to the credit of Madhu. He is a young man who has taken to atheism. He acquitted himself so well in social relations, that his villagers chose him to be the president of the village committee, against the rich and powerful man of the place who held the post for two terms already. The machinations of the rich man could not unseat Madhu by virtue of his sheer spotless character.

Lavanam and Mrs. Lavanam successfully conduct an experiment in reclaiming criminals

at Stuartpuram (Guntur District) and they withstand the threats of vested interests in the crimes, on account of their straight forwardness. J. Vengala Rao, Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, has extended his moral support to it.

The work at the atheist centre gained publicity abroad by the visits of foreign visitors to atheist centre. I was invited to the Congress of the International Humanist and Ethical Union at Boston, U S.A. in 1970 and for the next Congress at Amsterdam in 1974. In that context I had the opportunity to tour Europe, America, Australia and other countries in Asia. At that time I visited Madalyn Murray O'Hair at Austin, Texas. She is well known for her successful struggle to end prayer and the Bible reading in Public Schools. With the slogan of "Tax the Church", she started the Society of Separationists (SOS). As a result of exchange of views between us in 1970 she started the American Atheist Centre at Texas.

Likewise, when I visited Adelaide, Laurence Bullock was the Secretary of the Rationalist Association of South Australia. The Association considered it appropriate to change the name of their Association to the Atheist Society of Australia. Thus, rationalist and humanist societies are preferring the name of atheism, which

they deem more appropriate to describe their attitude.

Whatever be the name, the International Humanist and Ethical Congress as well as Rationalist and Humanist Associations all over the world gave me a free platform for talking on atheism. Moreover, the platforms of Quaker groups everywhere, invited me for discussions on atheism. Thus atheism is no longer a condemned label. The conduct of atheists has salvaged it from the depths of slander. The name is getting the respect that is its own and has been denied to it so long.

We conducted the Atheist Meet in 1970 at Patamata and the World Atheist Meet there again in 1972. Madalyn Murray O'Hair was to preside over it, but she could not go to India on account of visa trouble. At the World Atheist Meet, R. Kasturi of Coimbatore released my book *Positive Atheism*. Margarat Reish and Edwin Lindseen were the two delegates from USA to the World Atheist Meet. Details of the report about the World Atheist Meet were published in *The Atheist*.

CHAPTER - XVIII

ATHEIST CENTRES

When Saraswati and I went to Gandhi in 1944, we had eight children. Now we have nine and ninteen grand children, including three great-grand children. Gandhi was surprised how we managed that big family without private property. He had not seen any of the kind so far. The speciality, if any, is due to our atheistic outlook.

Atheism understands that all distinctions between one person and another are of our own making. Distinctions of caste, religion and culture exist so long as we accept them. We can change them whenever we desire. One belongs to a caste because he accepts and declares it. There are cases where at strange place persons have taken the label of the caste which is convenient there. National differences change with frontiers. Classes go when property relations are changed. Even racial traits blur with blood-mixture. When they exist, they are not related to attainment of talent or exercise of intelligence. Family relationship also is one of the kind.

The institution of family grows out of the custom of marriage in man woman relationship.

If there is promiscuity, clans and groups or wider human societies may form. But relationships like brother-sister, father mother, son-daughter, aunt-uncle, husband-wife will disappear. All people move as friends.

Whether the institutions of marriage and family will ever go out of use is a hypothetical question. Care of children, affectionate attention and emotional satisfaction of a sense of belonging are advantages and they outweigh the snobbery of paternalism and predisposition of kinship which accompany family ties. Guarantee of social security by the government and, especially, socialisation of property loosened family loyalties to a large extent. Yet, family remained for its own reasons. Now, the question before the atheists is not whether family should remain or go, but whether family relationships should be safer than friendly relationships? Are not family relationships as artificial as religious brotherhood, national fellowship, cultural bond, racial alliance or class comraderie, deserving no special consideration?

To the atheist mind all persons seemed the same without difference between members of the family and friends of atheism. Hence, at the atheist centres, we all moved equal. The members of the family are dear to us not by sanguinity but

by their devotion to and participation in atheist programmes. The success of the conversion of members of family into workers of atheism is seen by the generous help we received from the public for the upkeep of atheist centres. They little complain of my large family. On the contrary, they complimented me on having a good band of workers in my family. In this context I should make special mention of S. N. Agarwal and Bjorn Merker.

S. N. Agarwal was the Managing Director of Dholpur Glass Works. He visited our centre at Patamata and was pleased with the way my daughter Mythri and my daughter-in-law Hemalata were running the school for children, *Vasavya Vidyalaya*, with the assistance of Shri Rajyam Patnaik. He was impressed with the team spirit of the workers and attachment of the students to the teachers alike. He donated the glassware from his factory sufficient both to equip a laboratory to teach the children and to conduct periodical science exhibitions, especially to explain superstitions scientifically and to dispel faith in them. One exhibition was opend by Agarwal himself and another by Dr. C. D. Deshmukh and Durgabai Deshmukh. Balchand Mohta of Calcutta helped us with donation of money and material.

Bjorn Merker is a boy from Sweeden who came to India to do alternative civil service to compulsory military training in Sweeden. He was at the Atheist Centre for seven months. He identified himself so intimately with the programmes of the Center that he recommended atheist center to his parents for help. Dr. Helmot and Mrs. Ulla Merker kindly sent us contributions every month out of their salaries and helped us partly to maintain the centre and mostly to carry on the work in slums. They were my standing hosts in Sweden when I visited Europe in 1970 and again in 1974. Dr. Marla and Irma were similarly helpful to us in West Germany.

In India where there is no social security guaranteed by the government, the entire responsibility of bringing up children rests upon the parents. Incidentally, the children imbibe the outlook of the parents. So it was the case with my children too. But, if they disagreed with the ideas of the childhood, they could leave the home and stand on their feet. As all my children received good education with the help of the public, any of them could leave atheist centres and live their own way. In fact, my son in law, Ramalingaiah left the Atheist Centre at Patamata, when he did not like our Partylessness. He lives by

his homeopathic medical practice and other means. So far none of my children have chosen to leave the Atheist Centre. They live in the Centre as atheist workers.

While a blood relative like Ramalingayya left Atheist Centre, we continue to enjoy the cooperation and identification of workers like Kana, Ramaswamy, Chellayya, Madhu, Rangarao, Nagayya, Gopalaswamy, B. Venugopal and several others at atheist centres at Mudunur, Patamata, Suryapet, Pedanemali, Repalle and Nuzvid. Bhanu is Madhu's brother. But he is devoted to Atheist centre at Pedanemali more as an atheist worker than as the brother of Madhu, who is the person in charge of the centre.

Atheist centres with the ideology of equality of all humans work in the midst of people who are accustomed to sectarian customs. As in the case of every centre with a progressive ideology those around us subconsciously try to exploit us, though they consciously help us too sometimes. Our ideological impact on them and their conventional exploitation of us are mutual. The final result every time depends on the strength and weakness of each side.

In the case of simple families, leadership of an ideology often goes with relationship as with

inheritance of private property and skill of profession. But in atheism, a worker is one who works, irrespective of the family relationship. The test of work is the sacrifice of personal tastes and comforts for the promotion of social welfare. Social value of the work takes precedence over personal talent and training.

CHAPTER - XIX

FUTURE OF ATHEISM

As atheists assert the freedom of the individual, they are more concerned with present programmes for plans into the future more than with experiences of the past. What is good in the past readily comes into our present practice. Only that which is unsuitable or impracticable to present needs is left out. Moreover, too much thought over the past inhibits initiative and is not conducive to progress of civilization. Situations change from time to time and call for fresh thought, plan and action. Religious scriptures do the greatest harm in this context because they claim infallibility and unswerving loyalty. They stem progress by smothering initative and free thought. Any dogma, spiritualist or scientific, is equally inimical to progress. Therefore, those whom succeeding generations deem as prophets of eras of progress, were heretics of their own ages. They revised old scriptures and scrapped some of them. Revolutions demolish old ways and start afresh with new plans every time. In this way, atheism is the source of all innovation and progress. Old civilizations like those of Asia and Africa, are so much rooted in the past that they have become today a lumber of old and

new mixed in disgusting disorder. They need atheism more urgently than other countries where a series of religious, cultural, materialist and industrial revolutions have broken away people from the old repeatedly, and have made them more progressive than people of the ancient civilizations.

Though ancient civilizations need atheism more than modern ones, there is a general need of atheism for one important reason. The so-called developed nations indeed have achieved considerable progress technologically on account of their materialistic and scientific outlook. It is creditable so far. But the same developed nations have become exploiters of the weak people and have become war-mongers all over the globe since they lack social outlook. Scientific skill in the hands of developed nations has come to mean the greatest threat to life. Scientific progress is used for the manufacture of lethal weapons, subtle and secret, with immense potentialities, allowing neither privacy nor safety for anyone, including the one who wields the weapon. Suicide squads have come into vogue in military operations.

Atheism is scientific. But its science is subject to social obligations to fellow-humans. It changes the emphasis from simple science to social needs. If ancient civilizations are super-

stitious, modern civilizations are anti-social. Atheism has to set right the wrong on both sides to make them march together towards one-humanity pulling down the artificial barriers of caste and religion, nation and race, class and culture.

The ideal of one humanity is shared by the rationalists and humanists also. But they have not developed the machinery for its realisation since they have taken a non-political stance. Politics is the dominating power in the modern age. To ignore it is to fear to strike. Gandhi's Constructive Programme also was non-political. His greatest achievement consisted in winning independence for India through political action by a non-violent method. Constructive work was an extreme form of non-violence, too good to be real. Under the guidance of Vinoba Bhave, the Constructive work was given another vigorous trial under the name of Sarvodaya. The spectacular achievements at the start withered out in course of time, not because it lacked earnestness, but because it was non political. After fifteen years of diligent effort, Jayaprakash Narayan found that Sarvodaya should take to political programmes also. A big mass awakening followed Narayan's re-entry into active politics.

Democracy has a charm in the modern age. But party system is its unworthy temptation. It

has discredited Democracy. Frenzied zeal for one's own party and, then, indecent lust for the leadership of the party are at the base of the Watergate scandal and of the dictatorship in Bangla Desh and of the declaration of Emergency in India. Everything is in the name of democracy, but the content is partisan attitude, both for those in power and for those in opposition. Further, opposition is reduced to a mockery in party-democracy. Unhealthy rivalry as fanatical as that between blind religious faiths rises from party-attitudes. On account of the evils of the party-system, honest politicians and the mass of people are not only losing love for democracy but turning their interests away from politics. The growth of non-political attitudes is the result of party politics in democracy.

Non-politics is ineffective. Therefore, atheists as realists, rid democracy of parties and take to partyless democracy which is real and effective democracy.

The future of atheism consists in establishing partyless democracy and achieving one equal-humanity through it. National and racial differences vanish as real democracies federate at first for commonweal and then move towards one-humanity and one-world. The United

Nations Organization will have to convert itself into United People's Organization for the purpose. Atheist awakening rouses people all over the world into the feeling of mastership over their institutions and systems of life. The spread of the atheist outlook is hope of humanity to turn from war to peace, from slavery to freedom, from superstition to a sense of reality, from conflict to cooperation.

Gora suffered an attack of cerebral haemorrhage and died at once while addressing a public meeting on "Social Change in Rural India", held at Vijayawada on the evening of Saturday, July 26, 1975

Gora's death stunned every one as it was so sudden and shocking. Messages of condolence and sympathy poured in from all corners of the globe.

Gora lived and died an atheist. He lives in all those who stand for reason, truth love and tolerance and raise their voice against superstition, blind dogma, racial discrimination and social and economic inequalities. His work will be carried forward unhesitatingly.

GORA AND HIS WIFE SARASWATI

WE BECOME ATHEISTS is not only a life story of Gora but it is the result of Gora's practice of his principles, struggles, experiences and acheivements in the field of social change for the last five decades. In this endevour he enjoyed the full support and participation of his wife, Saraswati, and his entire family and friends. Born in 1902 in an orthodox Hindu family, took his Masters Degree in Natural Sciences and taught in various colleges for 15 years. Got dismissed twice for his atheist views, finally resigned the post in 1940. Founded Atheist Centre, participated in the struggle for freedom of India, talked with Mahatma Gandhi on atheism, travelled all over the world, including Soviet Union, championing the cause of atheism, and was in the forefront of non-violent direct action programmes in upholding the dignity of humans. A fighter and a writer known for his original ideas, edited *Sangham* in Telugu and *The Atheist* in English. His books *Positive Atheism, An Atheist with Gandhi, Why Gram-Raj* and *Partyless Democracy* can be considered as classics in their respective fields.

Gora died while speaking at a public meeting in Vijayawada on 26th July, 1975.